UNRAVELLING THE MAKING OF REAL UTOPIAS: DEBATES ON 'GREAT TRANSFORMATION' AND BUEN VIVIR AS COLLECTIVE LEARNING EXPERIMENTS TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY

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Zusammenfassung

Die immer offensichtlicher werdende Verflechtung der vielfältigen sozialen und ökologischen Krisen stellt Risikogesellschaften weltweit vor der Herausforderung, grundlegende Transformationen der vorherrschenden gesellschaftlichen Modelle und Lebensweisen vorzunehmen, welche sich an den kulturellen Vorstellungen des wohlhabenden globalen Nordens orientieren. Bisher haben sich jedoch sowohl internationale als auch lokale Versuche, globale Entwicklungspfade in Richtung „faire und nachhaltige“ Zukunft zu lenken, als weitgehend erfolglos erwiesen. Der weltweite Ressourcenverbrauch und die Degradierung der Biosphäre haben sich weiter verschärft und beschleunigt. In Anlehnung an die deutsche hermeneutische Tradition sowie an den französischen Poststrukturalismus und den amerikanischen symbolischen Interaktionismus versucht diese theoretische und empirische Dissertation, die strukturellen Zwänge zu modellieren, mit denen individuelle *change agents* konfrontiert sind, und sie daran hindern, sozial-ökologische "reale Utopien" (Bloch) voranzutreiben. Darüber hinaus nimmt diese Dissertation eine Typisierung möglicher Wege zur Überwindung solcher Einschränkungen vor, nämlich durch Eingriffe einer bestimmten Art von auf der meso-gesellschaftlichen Ebene operierender *Agency*, die wir als *Para-Governance* bezeichnen. Die Dissertation schließt mit einer Reflexion über die sich verändernden Formen und Funktionen von Governance im Anthropozän, die über herkömmliche, eng definierte rationalistische und institutionalistische Ansätze hinausgehen.

Schlüsselwörter: sozial-ökologische Transformation, Nachhaltigkeit, Transition, kollektives Lernen, gesellschaftlicher Wandel, sustainability governance, buen vivir, gutes Leben, Diskursanalyse.

Abstract

The increasingly apparent imbrication of the multiple social and ecological crises creates an imperative for "risk societies" worldwide to undertake fundamental transformations to the currently prevalent model of social organization shaped after the cultural imaginaries of the affluent Global North. So far, however, both international and local attempts at bending global developmental trajectories towards "fair and sustainable" futures have proven largely futile, with global resource-consumption and biosphere degradation further reinforcing and accelerating. Drawing on the German hermeneutic tradition, as well as on French post-structuralism and American symbolic interactionism, this *theoretical cum empirical* dissertation seeks to model the structural constraints weighting over 'change agents', thus preventing them from advancing social-ecological "real utopias" (Bloch), and typify possible ways of overcoming such constraints through interventions of a specific kind of agency identified as operating at the meso-societal level, which we refer to as *para-governance*. The dissertation concludes by reflecting on the changing forms and functions of governance in the Anthropocene beyond conventional narrowly defined rationalist and institutionalist approaches.

Keywords: social-ecological transformation, sustainability, transition, collective learning, societal change, sustainability governance, buen vivir, good living/ living well, discourse analysis.

A mi inolvidable amigo Mauricio Fernández Nuin,
Doctor *honoris causa* en transformación hacia la vida.
In Memoriam.

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List of Acronyms

BMBF	German Ministry for Education and Research
BMZ	German Ministry for Development Cooperation
BPB	German Federal Agency for Political Education
BV	Buen vivir
CIDOB	Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia
CL(P)	Collective Larning (Process)
CODAE	Afro-Ecuadorean Development Corporation
CODENPE	Development Council of the Nations and Peoples of Ecuador
CONAIE	Confederation of Indigenous Organizations of Ecuador
COP	Conference of the Parties
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DFG	German Research Society
EIM	Ecuadorian Indigenous movement
FEINE	Ecuadorian Federation of Evangelical Indigenous
FENOCIN	National Confederation of Peasant, Indigenous, and Black Organizations of Ecuador
GT	Great Transformation
GTZ / GIZ	German International Development Cooperation Agency
IoT	Internet of Things
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
NGO	Non-governmental organization
SD	Sustainable Development
SDGs	UN Sustainable Development Goals
SENPLADES	National Secretary of Development Planning of Ecuador
SET	Social-Ecological Transformation
SKAD	Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse
SMO	Social Movement Organization
SÖF	Social-Ecological Research
TD	Transformation (or Transition) Discourse
UBA	German Federal Environmental Agency
UBI	Universal Basic Income
UN	United Nations Organization
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNEP	United Nations Environmental Program
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
WiW	Growth in Transition Initiative by the Austrian 'Life Ministry'
WWL	Growth, welfare, quality of life

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Only a crisis - actual or perceived - produces real change. When that crisis occurs, the actions that are taken depend on the ideas that are lying around. That, I believe, is our basic function: to develop alternatives to existing policies, to keep them alive and available until the politically impossible becomes the politically inevitable.

Milton Friedman (1962), of all people

PART I

Transformation, collective learning, discourse, and agency.
A theoretical inquiry and integration attempt

INTRODUCTION

The future is radical. We just get to choose what type of 'radical' we want
Naomi Klein[1]

Only utopias are realistic: sustainability governance and the transformation imperative

The current phase in the historical evolution of human societies has been variously characterized by social thinkers as the age of global capitalism, network society, liquid modernity, the age of information or the digital age, depending on the variable emphases on economic, cultural, socio-structural, technological dimensions, as well as the globality or spatiotemporal embeddedness of the corresponding flows and structures.

Relevant for this research endeavor is departing from a perspective of existential risk of human societies. Back in the early 1990s, Ulrich Beck famously characterized the rapidly globalizing Western-style modern civilization as "risk society": a type of society signed by self-engendered *existential risks* (also called *civilizational* or *systemic* risks): nuclear weaponry, genetical engineering, petrochemical industry (now shown to be the cause of severe distortion in bio-geochemical cycles likely leading to major ecological disruption of planetary scope on a scale unprecedented in all of human history). Existential risks typically differ from conventional risks in that while the latter are personally experienced or at least cognoscible, determinable and often quantifiable, the latter are indeterminate, non-quantifiable, global, and only cognoscible in a mediated fashion – chiefly through science. Furthermore, while conventional risk is exogenous and modern societies have sought to shield themselves through technological ingenuity, systemic or existential risk is endogenous to modern societies, i.e. it is self-engendered as a by-product of industrial development, and potentially carries the risk of self-destruction. (Beck, 1992)

Since Ulrich Beck first formulated his epochal diagnosis, new existential risks have been added to the list: anthropogenic climate change, global biodiversity loss on a mass-extinction scale (Ceballos et al., 2015), or even, some claim, recent developments in learning-capable machines (so-called artificial

[1] Keynote speech at the 2016 Six degrees Citizen Space (retrieved on 10th August 2017): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M8Ru2ik_hEs

intelligence or A.I.). Unlike nuclear threats or A.I., however, ecological Earth-systemic disruptions are existential risks densely imbricated with the very fabric of social life, and therefore constitute an inherently sociological object of study. Global Environmental Change (hereafter: GEC[2]) thus poses a special case of existential risk: one that is the result of the global aggregate of production, consumption, and disposal patterns, with their respective cultural, political, and economic drivers.

To be sure, at the latest since the Neolithic revolution some 12.500 years ago – i.e. the transition from nomadic hunter-gatherer to agricultural societies –, human activities have ostensibly affected their ecological environment. But it was not until the 20th century that human activities "rapidly changed from merely influencing the global environment in some ways to dominating it in many ways" (Steffen, Crutzen, & McNeill, 2007, p. 614). Various scientific reports impressively describe the enormous and accelerating growth in the use of natural resources (fossil fuels, biomass, and minerals) and multiple forms of pollution during the 20th century (Steffen, 2004; UNEP, 2011). Moreover, the interlinkages between changes in human production and consumption, indicated by gross domestic product, direct foreign investment, energy consumption and telecommunications, and changes in the Earth's natural systems: climate (greenhouse gas levels, global temperature), ocean acidification, terrestrial biosphere degradation and fish capture have only recently been so systemically emphasized (Rockström et al., 2009). As of the 1950s – over a single human lifetime –, the scale of human impacts on the Earth-system has reached tectonic proportions (Steffen, 2004), arguably marking a new geological epoch in planetary history: the *Anthropocene*[3] (Chakrabarty, 2009; Crutzen & Stoermer, 2000; Latour, 2014; Steffen et al., 2007; Syvitski, 2012). The historical singularity of these extraordinary recent developments – which are jointly known as "The Great Acceleration" – cannot be emphasized

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[2] *Global Environmental Change* (GEC) is an umbrella term, coined in the natural sciences, lumping together a complex array of major alterations in planetary bio-chemical and physical systems, which are, however, studied in their complex interactions as a single system: the Earth-System (among many others: Schellnhuber, 2004; Steffen, 2004)

[3] There is no scientific consensus in officially acknowledging the Anthropocene as a new geological epoch. Yet this does not diminish its metaphorical force to convey the idea of the scale, intensity, and potential consequences of human activities on the planet: the Earth-system is operating in a non-analogue state as compared to the last half-million years, probably the last 2 million years (Open Science Conference Amsterdam, 2001). Yet despite the rapidly growing popularity of the term, increasingly also in the social sciences (reason for which it is also adopted here, to flatten communication), a more precise conceptualization would prefer terms such as "Econocene" or "Capitalocene", which correct the naturalistic bias of the idea that 'humans' (per se) are to blame for Earth-systemic disruptions that is implicit in the term "Anthropocene". (Malm & Hornborg, 2014)

enough. According to environmental historian John R. McNeill: "In time, the environmental dimension of twentieth-century history will overshadow the importance of events like the world wars, the rise and fall of communism, and the spread of mass literacy". Framed in deeper historical context "reveals the absurdity of claims that ancient evolutionary traits inexorably led *Homo sapiens* to destroy earth systems" (Malm & Hornborg, 2014; Paulson, 2017, p. 441). The Anthropocene marks a historical – or, borrowing Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2009) and Bruno Latour's neologism (2014)[4] – a *geostorical* singularity, both as an Earth-systemic phenomenon and as a political challenge (Biermann, 2011a). I refer to this singularity as *geostorical exceptionalism* and the social and political challenges derived thereof are hereinafter referred to as *geostorical challenges*. The development of modes of social organization that feed from and into a closed biological, chemical, and physical loop with the biosphere in a way that is functional to the reproduction of (human) life on Earth – usefully synthesized in the term *sustainability* - is thus increasingly recognized as arguably the most "vital problem of [global] collective life" (Bajoit, 2011). We will refer to the realm of deliberate interventions to advance sustainability as *sustainability governance*.

Toward the 1970s, the rising awareness of the unintended effects of globalized Western-style development on the biosphere and its unbridled consumption of resources cast a shadow over the triumphant narrative of modernization (Beck, 1992; Pelfini, 2005; Reißig, 2009), along with its subjacent narratives of progress, and, in particular, with the more ideologically tainted narrative of 'development' (Wolfgang. Sachs, 2010). This ideal of *development*, which throughout the second half of the 20th century asserted itself as a universal evolutionary horizon, modeled after Western standards and then disseminated globally, thus becomes the object of critical interrogation[5]: After 40 years of

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[4] Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that Earth System research forces us to broaden our conceptualization of human beings from that of biological and historical agents, to that of *geological* agents. And Latour speaks of human beings having *slipped from historical to geostorical time* without taking due notice.

[5] A semantic digression is required between "development" understood as *evolution*, and "Development" (identified here through the use of upper case, italics, or else quotation marks), understood as an *ideology,* i.e. a particular discourse posing as a false universal. While analytically unequivocal, this distinction appears often blurred in empirical usage of the word. The critique of Development as ideology has been systematized particularly well in the current of thought known as *post-development*. While this trend of thought is wide and expanding, it is exemplified in the work of Wolfgang Sachs, Serge Latouche, Gustavo Esteva, Ivan Illich, Arturo Escobar, J. Martinez-Alier, Aram Ziai, i.a. Consider, by way of illustration, the texts compiled by Majid Rahnema and Victoria Bawtree in the *Post-Development Reader* (1997), or in the *Postdevelopment dictionary* (Kothari, Salleh, Escobar, & Demaria, 2018). For an in-depth discussion and a comprehensive literature review on the (sustainable) development discourse, see (Vanhulst & Beling, 2014a)

global 'development', the vast majority of the world keeps struggling to emulate the 'developed countries', while both 'developed' and 'developing' ones keep operating at an enormous ecological and social cost. Indeed: it is not only environmental crises that put the modernization model of the West[6] under siege: much of the optimism and hopes for global economic prosperity and universal improvement in life-conditions heralded by the 'development era' have begun to crumble under the weight of evidence: persistent poverty and hunger (Hickel, 2016b; Woodward, 2015) , growing inter- and intra-national inequality (Jodhka, Rehbein, & Souza, 2018; Oxfam, 2016; Piketty, 2014; J. E. Stiglitz, 2012), rocketing public and private indebtedness (Streeck, 2013), hyper-financialization of the economy, and even the decoupling of economic growth from various measures of subjective well-being and life satisfaction in affluent countries (so-called 'Easterlin paradox') (Dörre, Lessenich, & Rosa, 2015; Easterlin, 1974; W. Sachs, 2007) threw the worldview of Development into a crisis of legitimacy.

This crisis of legitimacy of the Development worldview and the emergence of the environmental discourse in the global North upset socio-cognitive and cultural templates, leading to the diffraction of Development into a heterogeneous discursive field (Dryzek, 1997; Hopwood, Mellor, & O'Brien, 2005; W. Sachs, 1997), including debates around the global environment, poverty, fair resource policy, debt relief or debt condonation for developing countries, and a fair framework for international trade. Especially in the 1970s, the debate on ecological sustainability and development yielded genuinely alternative proposals to the Development worldview, such as the *limits to growth* (D. H. Meadows, Meadows, Randers, & Behrens, 1972), *de-growth* (A. Gorz), *eco-development* (Maurice Strong, Ignacy Sachs), *convivialism* (Alain Caillé, Ivan Illich), or *post-development* (Illich, Gorz, Escobar, Latouche, W. Sachs). While these debates were largely confined to scholarly and policy spheres, strong counter-cultures did emerge in parallel. Examples are the so-called 68-generation, the hippie movement, and

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6 As opposed to a monolithic conception of a single trajectory of modernity, which has characterized the classical theory of modernity and its structuring concepts of 'progress' and 'development', in this research we depart from a pluralist conception of "multiple modernities" (Eisenstadt, T. Larrain, Wittrock) – or else "entangled modernities" (J. P. Arnason, G. Therborn), "hybrid modernity" (García Canclini), global modernity (Dirlik, Domingues), or "modernity as experience and interpretation" (P. Wagner). The 'classical' monistic view of modernity has become the object of heavy criticism in the second half of the 20th century for its linear, ethnocentric, and colonialist character. This normative critique was reinforced by the empirical description of historically novel phenomena, such as a globalization of unprecedented scale, speed, and intensity; the emergence of divergent and conflictual evolutionary paths and dynamics in many parts of the world; the anthropogenic global ecological crisis; etc.

the environmental movement, in the North; and socialist-communitarian imaginaries (such as the Zapatista upheaval in Mexico), the utopian landless peasant and indigenous movements, and the 'environmentalism of the poor' (Alier, 2002), in the South.

In 1992, however, the Earth-Summit in Rio de Janeiro brought these debates to a closure through the political consensus-formula of *sustainable development* (hereafter SD), while radical discursive diversity was thereafter confined to the margins of society[7] (Brand, 2016c; Paulson, 2017) or else subsumed under the label of "ecological modernization" (Jänicke, 1993; Mol, 1997; Spaargaren & Mol, 1992), with its hitherto unattainable promises of social, (capitalist-)economic, and ecological 'triple win'.

From the perspective of advancing sustainability, however, the discursive foreclosure that came with Rio 1992 proved, in hindsight, to be premature. Western-style societies had not even assimilated the type and scope of changes required to match the challenges of sustainability (Gomez-Baggethun & Naredo 2015; Asara et al. 2015 and Escobar 2015, let alone figured out how to implement them. In terms of the theoretical and conceptual framework to be introduced in Chapter 1: The shutdown of discursive contestation as of the 1990s halted or froze *collective learning processes*. Indeed, despite noteworthy innovations at the institutional (the UN Framework Conventions on Climate Change and Biodiversity, International Environmental Agreements, markets for so-called 'ecological services', etc.) and material-practical level (recycling, green technologies, etc.), as well as an impressive resonance with public opinion – to date, over hundred million websites feature the word 'sustainability' (Gómez-Baggethun & Naredo, 2015) –, the empirical evidence unambiguously shows that 40 years of global sustainability governance efforts have been metaphorically akin to "re-arranging deck-chairs on the Titanic" (Schellnhuber): the world has never moved faster and farther away from ecological sustainability than today[8]. Life-support systems and the natural resource base continue to critically deteriorate at global scale and accelerating rates (Rockström et al., 2009; Steffen et al., 2015). This is

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[7] The burial of agonistic sustainable development debates from the 1970s and 1980s coincided with the rise of neoliberalism as capitalist mode of regulation. For a political-economic theorization of the dynamics of capitalism and social stability and the fragile equilibrium fictitiously maintained throughout the post-war period, see Streeck (2011, 2013), Dörre (2009), Dörre, Lessenich & Rosa (2015).

[8] To be sure, particular improvements of environmental indicators at the local and urban levels do exist, but they cannot be attributed pre-figurative character toward a virtuous systemic change, in so far methodological and measurement biases (e.g. methodological nationalism) largely explain such alleged 'improvements' (Jackson 2014).

coupled with arguably worsening general social life conditions and trends, both in the South and in the North, including unsustainable demographic and urbanization patterns (Demaria & Schindler, 2016; WBGU, 2016), unprecedently broadening gaps in wealth and income distribution (Oxfam, 2016), and renewed 'apartheidization' along class, ethnic or cultural lines, etc. (Escobar, 2012a; W. Sachs & Santarius, 2007).

This severe underperformance (if not wholesale failure) of sustainability governance has had at least two explanations from a cultural-political vantage point.

First, the much touted *'value-action gap'* (also called 'knowledge-action gap'): the need for deep changes in patterns of production, consumption, and disposal of Western-style societies is broadly acknowledged[9], yet this acknowledgement has no observable practical consequence (Leiserowitz, Kates, & Parris, 2006; Misereor & IHS, 2013). The derived course of action is continuously investing more resources in understanding how to 'close the gap' (Shove, 2010a).

The very concept of a 'value-action gap', however, faces heavy criticism because of its behaviorist bias, which makes praxis a dependent variable of ideational change, thus downplaying the dialectical character of the interrelation between the spheres of ideas and of social practice (Shove, 2010a). A more sophisticated understanding of the social world and of social change as resulting from altered contexts of practice is required[10], yet hardly anywhere in sight. Another blind spot in the 'value-action gap'-argument is the assumption that there is a rather consistent value-orientation which just needs to be properly translated into practice. But the interpretation of abstract ideas of the good is always contingent. Dipesh Chakrabarty writes: "whatever our socioeconomic and technological choices, whatever the rights we wish to celebrate as our freedom, we cannot afford to destabilize conditions (such as the temperature zone in which the planet exists) that work like boundary parameters of human existence" (Chakrabarty, 2009, p. 218). In practice, however, the widespread acknowledgement of the need to generate profound changes to production and consumption patterns is somehow assumed to

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9 Poll-based studies consistently show a steady increase in environmental awareness worldwide: see, for example, R. Inglehardt (1997), and more recently the studies by the BBC (2007), Brechin & Bhandari (2011), or the World Values Survey (2014)

10 In this vein, Oliver Stengel provides a more accurate version of this dilemma, as a gap between the *true* (i.e. the scientifically mediated evidence of global change) and the *good* (currently preferred lifestyles are still anchored in the pathos of an "age of exuberance") (Stengel, 2011, p. 349)

be harmonizable with the logic of ever-expansive consumer capitalism[11] through human ingenuity and technological progress. The possibility of alternative forms of economic organization and understandings of the good life are thereby rendered unlikely, laughable, or – worse even – invisible. Though this belief largely runs against accumulated evidence, it does not seem to be up for debate in the current cultural and political mainstream. Chakrabarty's warning is turned a blind eye to.

The stubborn denial of (even considering the possibility of there being) a conflictive relationship between 'green' and consumerist values that permeates public and policy debates points to a second possible understanding of the failure of sustainability governance: In his address to the UN General Assembly in 2015, UN Good Will Ambassador, Leonardo di Caprio, drew an analogy between his profession as an actor and the way climate change has been addressed so far in global politics: "As an actor, I pretend for a living. I play fictitious characters often solving fictitious problems. I believe that mankind has looked at climate change in that same way". Ingolfur Blühdorn (2007) has formulated the hypothesis of a "post-ecologist" *pathos* in politics and culture that draws on di Caprio's appreciation: while the ecological imperative mandates adapting social ways of life to the carrying capacity of the biosphere, both governments and their constituencies are tacitly complicit in a "performance of seriousness" whose unspoken aim is that of "sustaining what is known to be unsustainable, for as long as possible". The failure of sustainability governance is therefore not to be understood as a "value-action" gap, but rather as an exercise in "societal self-delusion" by which we preach to each other about a 'sustainable future' that remains necessarily elusive. From a perspective of collective learning, the talk can no longer be of "simultaneous learning and non-learning", but rather of halted, aborted or else co-opted collective learning processes.

This glim picture should not be mistaken for misanthropic catastrophism, however. Rather, it is aimed at making the case for the relevance of our enquiry: *When the continuation of reality becomes utopian*, as it were, *"only utopias are realistic"* (Negt, 2012). Reactivating – that is: reviving the utopian cultural and political imagination – becomes, at this point, more than ever before, a survival imperative for modern civilization, and possibly for the human species as such[12]. This is largely dependent on whether

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11 For an in-depth analysis of the tensions between the 'consumer society' and the ecological crisis, see Oliver Stengel's (2011) comprehensive argument pleading for a culture and politics of sufficiency.

12 Statements such as this are, of course, discursively embedded, too. Yet in the framework of this thesis, the consistent accumulating body of empirically-founded scientific evidence over decades on the matter will be assumed a safe stepping stone for both scholarly as well as political reflection and

'catastrophism' can be rendered *emancipatory*: same as there are negative side-effects to the production of goods – so the basic storyline of the risk society thesis –, there are also positive side-effects to the anticipation of global catastrophe (Beck, 2015b).

But does such anticipation have the potential to alter the social and political order of the world?

> 'Yes, it does' is my answer, but in a very different way than we expect and imagine it. The scale of change is beyond our imagination. The idea that we are the masters of the universe has totally collapsed and has turned into its opposite. In the age of climate change, modernization is not about progress, or about apocalypse – this is a false alternative. Rather, it is about something 'in-between'. We do not even have a word for this; we need a new public and scientific vocabulary. I propose the notion of '*Verwandlung*' – 'metamorphosis of the world' (Beck, 2015b, pp. 75–76)

Beck's idea of "metamorphosis" remits to the type of whole-societal change described by Karl Polanyi[13] in his opus magnum "The Great Transformation" (1944) to characterize the disruptive upheaval of productive systems and ways of life with the emergence of industrial capitalism in the 18th-19th century England. There is now widespread scientific and political consensus that a "new Great Transformation"[14] (Kates, Travis, & Wilbanks, 2012; Reißig, 2011; WBGU, 2011) – hereinafter referred to as *social-ecological transformation*[15] (SET) – of contemporary societies on a Polanyian scale in

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action. The epistemological nature and validity of this assumption are discussed more thoroughly in the closing section of Chapter 2.

[13] Inspired by Polanyi's metaphor, the terms "Great Transformation" or else "Great Transition" are deployed today to visualize a historic shift of similar proportions for the 21st century by a variety of actors in the academia, civil society, and increasingly also in government (Brand, 2016a; Demirovic, 2012; Narberhaus, 2012; Raskin, 2008; Spratt, Murphy, & New Economics Foundation, 2009; WBGU, 2011)

[14] The current deployment of the term 'transformation' to connote the idea of a sustainability-oriented restructuration of Western-style modernity should be clearly distinguished from the narrower use of the term established in the social sciences during the 1990s to refer to the study of societal change in Eastern-European countries after the fall of the "iron curtain".

[15] The choice of the particular term "social-ecological transformation" is aimed as facilitating communication, as the former became established as the umbrella term for the discussion around a whole-societal transformation towards sustainability in the German debate (Deutscher Bundestag, 2013; W. Sachs, 2013). In other words, SET is an originally empirical concept turned into an analytical one (e.g. Brand, 2012a; Brie, 2014). Instead, I reserved the Polanyian term "Great Transformation" to refer to my object of inquiry (i.e. the empirical debate in Germany around a SET).

the coming decades is inevitably to unfold, be it "by design or by disaster"[16]. As the term 'social-ecological transformation' connotes, the main object of this fundamental redefinition is the mode of relationality between society and their ecological base, between the 'sociosphere' and the biosphere. Indeed, *trans-formation* etymologically implies a radical semantics which could be reworded into something like 'constitutive change' (Brand, 2012b)[17]. The concept of 'transformation' has become a buzzword in social-ecological debates over the last few years, particularly in the global North. The concept has been adopted by flagship reports of international institutions and think tanks[18], become the header of research programs (Future Earth, 2017; Hackmann & Moser, 2013b; Hackmann & St. Claire, 2012), and convening political debate (Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund & Deutsche Naturschutzring, 2012; Deutscher Bundestag, 2013; Felder & et. al, 2012). The rise of 'transformation' can be attributed to, perhaps, first and foremost, the ever broader recognition of the profound character of the global environmental crisis; second, to the increasingly obvious limits to existing forms of (global) sustainability governance (Blühdorn, 2007; Edwards, 2010; Huesemann & Huesemann, 2011; Santarius, 2012); thirdly, to the most immediately perceptible socio-economic consequences of the multiple crisis in the aftermath of the economic meltdown of 2008, and, fourthly, with intensified debates about the need for profound social change, in particular regarding the society-nature relations (Brand, 2016b). The practical implications of the aforesaid are, however, far from consensual: the scope, the speed, and the means that are necessary to initiate and to advance such processes, are subject to controversial debate.

There exists, however, a level of meta-consensus regarding these implications. Indeed, the "long breaking distance" – i.e. the time gap between the moment of generation of causes and the moment

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16 The concept of "by design" is often used in opposition to "by disaster" (see for example Welzer & Sommer, 2014; Zelik & Tauss, 2013), implying that fundamental societal change is inevitable under present global conditions: the relevant ethical and political question is how much and what kind of control we can and should exercise over this change process. For a discussion about the possibility, risks, nuances, and the historically peculiar imperative for such a transformation "by design" see, for example, Stirling (2015).

17 In German, the concept of transformation is often substituted by that of "Wende", meaning a U-turn or radical change (e.g. *Energiewende*, *Agrar-* or *Nahrungswende*, *Wachstumswende*, *Forschungswende*, etc.)

18 By way of illustration of this trend, consider the *Global Environmental Outlook GEO 5* Report by UNEP (UNEP/PNUMA, 2012b, 2012a); the *Transition to sustainability* report by IUCN (W. M. Adams, Jeanrenaud, IUCN Future of Sustainability Initiative, & IUCN--The World Conservation Union, 2008); or else the *State of the World* reports by The Worldwatch Institute, particularly the 2010 and 2012 issues (Assadourian, 2012; Assadourian & The Worldwatch Institute, 2010), among many others.

of observability of effects with many global environmental changes (e.g. climate change) – implies that, if an ecological Armageddon is to be averted, the upcoming transformation cannot be awaited to unfold reactively in the form of gradual evolutionary change: it needs to be deliberately propelled "for reasons of insight, prudence, and foresight" (WBGU 2011, p. 5). It requires more than the gradual, evolutionary learning that has driven the succession of an epochal *episteme* into the next throughout human history (Foucault, 2012): it requires deliberate triggering, fostering, and accelerating sustainability-oriented collective learning processes at all levels of society (Escobar, 2013; Hackmann & Moser, 2013a; Tàbara, 2013).

While the capacity or limitations of human agency to straightforwardly 'design' or 'implement' a transformation of social and cultural arrangements remain an open interrogation – let alone its desirability, considering the catastrophic experiences with attempts at "social engineering" in the 20th century – collective learning and transformation processes can surely be deliberately *influenced*[19]. In fact, learning is an emergent effect from the complex interactions of myriad ongoing intended and unintended agential interventions into the social fabric. Therein lies the historically unique challenge with regard to the upcoming transformation into an ecologically viable society, as opposed to the "Great Transformations" of the past. Due to the 'long breaking distances' involved, the next "Great Transformation" must be anticipated; that is, the standard historic reaction – i.e. a change of direction in response to crises and disasters – must be avoided (WBGU 2011, p. 5). This requirement for an actively 'transformative agency' is a constitutive dimension of what we have termed "geostorical exceptionalism".

Yet the above are normative assertions (albeit hardly controversial ones). Can such learning also be studied empirically? What processes of transformative learning can be observed in the empirical world? Where are the agents of such transformation, and how are they exerting their influence? What structural or contingent contextual factors are alternatively aiding or hindering transformative learning processes, as well as their materialization in the empirical world?

At the beginning of the 21st century, with the backwind of the great economic crises at the turn of the century in the global south, and at the end of the first decade of the 21st in the global north, has unleashed a revival of the social (Occupy, Indignados in the North; indigenous and landless peasants,

[19] The role of human agency in deliberately advancing collective learning towards sustainability is discussed at length in Chapter 2.

in the South) and academic critique of capitalism (Brand & Wissen, 2017; Crouch, 2011; Dörre et al., 2015; Streeck, 2011), and, more generally, of the ideology of development which sustains it (Burchardt, Peters, Weinmann, & Akademie der Diözese Rottenburg-Stuttgart, 2017; Escobar, 2012a; Gudynas, 2014; Latouche, 2009; Ziai, 2007). In addition, the failure of current governance institutions not only to bend socio-economic and ecological, but also to imagine other development pathways beyond the resigned fatalism of TINA-managerialism (H. Rosa, 2010), has triggered a worldwide legitimacy and efficacy crisis of governance. These contradictions and deadlocks place hitherto resilient conventions and convictions under greater stress, bringing the historically developed ecological, socio-economic, and cultural critiques of Western-style modernization into convergence (Asara, Otero, Demaria, & Corbera, 2015). These convergent critiques are not only fostering a re-activation of debates, but also the production of alternatives[20].

Some scholars have raised attention to globally distributed yet convergent newly emerging collective learning processes (hereafter CLPs) which go beyond adaptive proposals that "offer Anthropocene conditions as solutions" (Escobar, 2013, p. 3). Such processes can be identified – in more or less institutionalized fashion, and at uneven stages of development – in multiple societal spheres, ranging from social movements at global (*Via Campesina*; Divest movement), regional (e.g. Degrowth), or local level (e.g. "*Wir haben es satt*" in Germany, a movement made of peasants and concerned citizens against the agribusiness model); in meso-level developments, such as the 'silent revolution' of the "democratization of science"[21]; but also, macro-scale political and cultural experiments such as *Buen Vivir* in the Andean-Amazonian countries of Latin America.

These developments may appear of marginal importance, at face value (i.e. as measured by their observable impact in global macro-societal trends). Yet taken together in their mutual (potential) interactions, they point at a larger shift in the 'deep structures' of Western-style societies. This is, to

[20] The ensuing fundamental critique of the *development* model of the West, however, coexists with – and is often overshadowed by – ardent conservative reactions, as visible in the rise of right-wing populism in the global north, both at the level of crisis-movements (e.g. PEGIDA in Germany) and governments (Trump). While such developments are proving increasingly disruptive in sociopolitical terms, they remain essentially reactive. The social and scholarly attention focus, however, tends to be all too readily displaced towards these eye-catching symptoms, leading to hasted misrecognition of causal linkages with (and distortion of the historical proportions vis-à-vis) the game-changing transformations coming up in the face of the rising "geostorical era" in the history of our species.

[21] For background, see section 4.2.3. in Chapter 4.

be sure, a line of inquiry that focuses on – thereby also making scholarly room for – nascent *utopias*, rather than on manifest social trends, adding to an emerging scholarly agenda (Escobar, 2013; Santos, 2004; Schneidewind, 2015; Wright, 2013). But, following Ernst Bloch's (1995) distinction, it does not amount to engaging in wishful thinking about what we would like the world to be (i.e. "compensatory utopias"), but rater intensively searching for concrete existing potentials and trends towards alternatives, which can be activated – i.e. "concrete utopias" or "real utopias" (Wright, 2013)[22].

Insofar this PhD thesis deals with ('concrete') utopias that only manifest materially in emergent form, knowledges, meanings, and imaginaries – notions which are operationalized here with the concept of *discourse* – take center stage. Or, more precisely, the "discursive practices" and their carrying agents, which make them echo (or not) in the resonance board of brader society, potentially triggering collective learning processes. Indeed, CLPs can arise "in the form of alternative discourses, sub-political influences, and subversive topical contributions" (Pelfini, 2005, p. 38). Arturo Escobar has named such discursive projects aimed at breaking dominant imaginaries on sustainable development (SD) *transition* or *transformation discourses* (TDs). Variously conceptualized in terms of a paradigm-shift, system-change, or civilizational change, TDs share the common contention that the contemporary ecological and social crises are inseparable from the model of social life shaped after Western standards that has become dominant globally (Escobar, 2015, p. 452). While wide open in their specific discursive contents or "interpretative repertoires" (Keller, 2011), they can be generally characterized as articulating "veritable cultural and ecological transitions to different societal models, going beyond strategies that offer Anthropocene conditions as solutions" (Escobar, 2013, p. 3).

This PhD thesis will theoretically address the issue from a two-fold perspective:

First, *discourse research* will serve to identify discourses (or discursive elements: frames, narratives, categorial and phenomenal structures) that challenge the hitherto dominant SD orthodoxy (discourse as *representation*), on the one hand, and to reconstruct the typical agent practices and roles enacted to this effect (discourse as *practice*), on the other. The goal is assessing how particular "dramaturgical" conditions (actors performing discourses in a given socio-political and cultural setting) influence the ability of TDs to effectively challenge dominant structures of the discursive field of SD.

[22] For a theoretical discussion on the epistemological status of utopias, see the *Excursus* on epistemological considerations at the end of Chapter 1.

Secondly, collective learning theory (CLP-theory) will serve as a broad critical theory of society[23], from which changes can be assessed as positive or negative – not from a transcendentalist or evolutionist perspective, but vis-à-vis the ultimate *telos* of preserving the integrity of the biosphere, as assessed through socio-ecological megatrends and the historical record of (mostly failed) Earth-system governance-attempts.

Case studies

The empirical aspect of this research addresses two case studies: the German debate on a *Great Transformation* (GT), which gathered sustained momentum over the second decade of this century (e.g. Brand, 2015), and the Latin-American *Buen Vivir* (BV), which has permeated the socio-political scenario in the Andean-Amazonian region, particularly Ecuador and Bolivia over roughly the same time-frame. Both these transformation discourses (TDs) catalyzed in response to major situated and acute crises: BV emerged at the turn of the century, out of the crisis of Latin-American political economies at the turn of the century. Having been tailored to the Washington-Consensus for over two decades, the ensuing socio-economic meltdown in several Latin-American countries eventually resulted in the much touted 'left-turn' (Beasley-Murray, Cameron, & Hershberg, 2009; Castañeda, 2006; Gudynas & Acosta, 2011b; Natanson, 2008) or 'post-neoliberal turn' (García Delgado & Nosetto, 2006; Pelfini, 2008; Radcliffe, 2012). The GT debate, in turn, gathered momentum towards the end of the 2000s against the backdrop of the greatest economic crisis in the industrialized world since the Great Depression of the 1930s, in what came to be known as the 'Great Recession', coupled with the crisis of multilateralism in climate policy, which became evident, at the latest, after the failure of the UN climate summit in Copenhagen, in 2009. Both TDs, however, reframed these conjunctural crises as global, systemic crises correspondingly demanding systemic solution-approaches: In the North, the talk is about a global "multiple interlinked crisis" (Brand, 2009; Germanwatch, 2012; Misereor & IHS, 2013; Reisch & Bietz, 2014), while in the South it was framed as a "civilizational crisis" (Escobar, 2010; Leff, 2004a).

Each in their respective contexts of emergence, BV and GT can thus be viewed as two grounded, multi-agent-driven experiments staging the struggle among diverse imaginations to foster comprehensive societal transformation in response to a global systemic crisis. What is exceptional in

[23] This framing of collective learning as a meta-theory significantly differs from its pioneering attempts at operationalization as a middle-range theory (e.g. Pelfini, 2005, 2007)

both these cases is that they have overflown societal niches of social practice and spilled into institutionalized platforms, informing the outlook, strategies, or programs of a variety of socio-politically and culturally influential institutions: BV has prompted profound reflection processes in the political, public, and scholarly spheres at the national level in Ecuador, Bolivia, and beyond; while GT has become an established *subpolitical*[24] discursive field in the German-speaking world, including sociopolitical actors such as NGOs, think tanks, state agencies in the development and environment sectors, and marginally also political parties and trade-unions, along with scientific bodies and research organizations. Hence both BV and GT – substantial and contextual differences notwithstanding – can be viewed as unlikely cases of 'successful' TDs in a discussion otherwise dominated by status-quo prone approaches. This makes them puzzling objects of enquiry.

Both the disparate character of these TDs in terms of their respective discursive processes and spatiotemporal contexts of embeddedness, as well as the asymmetric methodological approach to the two case-studies (see point on methodology below) would not allow for a strictly comparative research design. Nevertheless, fruitful insights can be gained from a juxtaposed analysis of both cases, i.e. from bringing them into resonance with each other. Furthermore, this 'dialogical perspective' adds interest from a vantage point of interrogating co-constitutive global-local interactions, as well as complementarities and possible synergies in both ideational and material terms (practices, structures).

Research question and goals

Based on theoretical analysis in triangulation with the insights gained through the empirical study of agential practices (intended or unintendedly) advancing collective learning processes in the case-studies of BV and GT, this PhD research aims at addressing the following general question:

How can collective learning processes towards a social-ecological transformation be deliberately fostered?

This general question can be broken down into the following sub-questions:

a. What structural obstacles constraining a 'transformative agency'[25] can be identified and how can they be overcome?
b. What ideational and material enablers towards a social-ecological transformation can be identified?

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[24] I adopted Ulrich Beck's concept of 'subpolitics' to refer to all forms of political activity taking place outside and beyond the formal political system.

[25] For a proper conceptualization of 'transformative agency' see Chapter 2, section ___

c. What ideal-typical roles and practices of 'transformative agency' can be identified?
d. What are the implications of the above for the theory and practice of sustainability governance?

The overall goal of this PhD thesis is to gain understanding of the mechanisms by which current unsustainable symbolic orders[26] are destabilized and new, transformative ones emerge in the case studies at hand, with th purpose of drawing insights for a theoretical and empirical outlining of the concept of transformative agency, and deriving implications for currently prevalent understandings of sustainability governance.

Specific goals are:

a. Analyze GT and BV as iconic TDs in North and South, both separately in their situated materiality and ideational dimensions, as well as in their reciprocal resonance and inter-imbrications, , to derive insights from their successes and shortcomings in advancing collective learning towards a social-ecological transformation.
b. Characterize the ideal-typical practices and roles of a 'transformative agency', as well as typical agent-constellations collectively steering societal learning and transformation processes towards sustainability.
c. Identify structures enabling or constraining agents' interventions towards a social-ecological transformation.
d. Develop an empirical- and a conceptual-theoretical framework providing insights into how to potentiate enablers and remove or mitigate constraints weighting upon transformative agency.

Methodological framework

This research endeavor can be inscribed within the interpretative paradigm in the social sciences[27].

[26] The concept of symbolic order is defined in Chapter 1, section 1.4.
[27] Precisions about the epistemological choices in this PhD thesis are laid out in the final section of Chapter 2.

The research dynamics was characterized by a dialectics between theory and empirical work, following an *abductive* logic (Swedberg, 2011, 2012a, 2012b) combining *induction* – from initial empirical observation ('empirical literacy') to the "kind of theorizing that takes place at the stage before the formulation of hypothesis" or research questions (2012a, p. 1) – and *deduction*: from the formulated theoretical problem to its empirical engagement. Lastly, the findings of empirical research feed back into theorizing.

A theoretical and an empirical dimension are thus integrated into the research design. Theoretical aspects include agency-based theories of social change, collective learning, and governance of societal change towards sustainability, as well as the peculiarities of the agency-structure balance in the context of the Anthropocene.

The empirical dimension poses greater challenges to the researcher: Insofar meaning-structures usually evolve in a rather fluid and continuous fashion, changes can be often recognized only *ex-post*, and only if they had a significant impact on social structures (thus becoming retrievable). An important part of social experience thus goes wasted. Furthermore, knowledge generated *ex-post* can be of little value when history has already taken a turn. In the face of *geostorical* challenges and the transformation-imperative derived thereof, understanding of ongoing or *emerging* alterations in prevailing meaning-structures may allow agents the necessary anticipation to engage in promoting presently unfolding learning processes, hence rescuing especially valuable (insofar transcending the prevalent symbolic order) social experience from oblivion and taking advantage of historical windows of opportunity. A methodological approach allowing to capture potentially significant discursive shifts in ongoing change processes is thus required; that is, one that captures the relevant empirically observable 'clues'[28] – a more evanescent ontological and epistemological category than conventional conceptions of 'hard' evidence – pointing at possible alterations in otherwise rather stable meaning-structures. In so doing, attention should be paid to the particular context of changes and their direction, allowing for the identification of discursive agents, their practices, *dispositifs*, and material or non-material effects.

The empirical study was done deploying an integrated theoretical-methodological approach combining a three-legged structure of data collection and data analysis: 1) a reconstruction of the respective fields of discursive practice in the two case-studies at hand (including processual or diachronic elements); 2) an interpretative-content analysis of discursive representations in each field

[28] Such an approach docks well with Santos' 'sociology of the non-existent' (i.e. *absences* and *emergences*), which is discussed in some detail in Chapter 2.

through the Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse (SKAD)(Keller, 2011), 3) a 'dramaturgical analysis' (J. C. Alexander, 2004) combining the two first stages into an integrated analysis of the pragmatic performativity of each situated discourse, merging materiality and imaginations embedded in structures, practices, and discourses into a single framework which allows us to distil enablers and obstacles to transformative collective learning. Each of these methods is outlined in detail alongside the respective empirical chapters.

Regarding data sources, the analysis of the GT-debate was based on primary, mostly documentary data (grey literature, policy documents, position-papers, political manifestos, etc.), understood as representative utterances of the discourses analyzed (Keller, 2011). Exploratory expert interviews and a review of secondary literature (academic overview studies) allowed to draw an initial outline of key actors, events, issues, and processes, which was then used to gather a relevant corpus of data, out of which two theoretical samples were drawn for the distinct phases of analysis. The samples were subject to systematic coding and analysis. The analysis of the BV-debate, in turn, drew on the abundant secondary literature available on the topic (including own work published throughout the research process in international peer-reviewed journals).

Partial elaborations were presented at academic events (conferences, colloquia), published in peer-reviewed journals, and included in teaching *syllabi* for increasing validity through 'social objectivation' (Keller, 2011, p. 109)

Ontological and epistemological assumptions

This dissertation departs from the following foundational assumptions:

First, as per current patterns in the Evolution of the Earth System (factoring in global ecological and worldwide socio-economic trends) a 'great transformation' of Euro-Atlantic modernity[29] triggered by fundamental changes in bio-physical life-support systems – other possible social triggers notwithstanding – is, in all likelihood, inevitable in the course of the present century (inter alia Brie, 2014; Daily & Walker, 2000; Homer-Dixon, 2009; Leggewie & Welzer, 2010; Reißig, 2011; W. Sachs,

[29] This prospective view of a major societal transformation resulting from exogenous drivers (and normatively advocated by most TDs) should not obscure the fact that modern capitalist societies are steadily changing, they are societies in continuous state of flux as a result of endogenous drivers such as market competition and their expansionist logic, social interaction, contradictions, and crises (Brand, 2015; Demirovic, 2012). The idea of a social-ecological transformation as a transition to a different type of society should therefore be distinguished from that of a constantly changing society as a result of structure-immanent dynamics.

2013; Schneidewind, 2015; WBGU, 2011). The continuation of the current socio-economic order based on accelerating consumption and extraction of natural resources can therefore be considered as nothing short of delusional. The question is less about whether or not fundamental changes will occur, but rather about *what* the transformation will look like and *how* it will unfold, as well as *who* will be the 'historical agent' (Touraine) carrying it forward, and in the interests of *whom*. This assessment underpins the assumption of a 'transformation imperative'.

Third: The paradigmatic framing of this dissertation within the interpretative tradition of Max Weber inherently conveys a set of assumptions about the way of grasping the world, and these have methodological implications: first, interpretation is only possible within the framework of a given 'hermeneutical horizon', hence the importance attributed to the identification of frames or background cultural assumptions in data analysis (see Chapter 3). Secondly, interpretation is always contingent upon the vantage-point of the analyst (hence the importance of making assumptions explicit, and of systematization and third-party validation or "social objectivation" throughout the analysis), but also upon the familiarity of the researcher with the 'universe of meaning' in which the phenomenon under study is embedded, hence the importance of "empirical literacy", i.e. the ethnographic involvement with the discussions constituting the object of observation, made possible through a long-term research stay in Berlin, in the case of the GT debate, and through ample familiarity with the BV debate though a range of peer-reviewed publications on the subject since 2012. Third, understanding is always contingent upon the aim at which the enquiry is directed, i.e. the question takes precedence over the answer: theory and methods should be tailored to the object of inquiry, not the other way around.

This research also goes beyond naturalist notions of rationality. Indeed, canonical approaches such as rational choice (agents 'pulled' by reward incentives, moral persuasion, or rational arguments) or institutionalist (agents 'puhsed' by social norms) have proven ill-suited to sustainability governance. While the individualistic, behaviorist bias of the former upholds unrealistic assumptions about how social change happens, as seen with the failure of behaviorist policy approaches (Shove, 2010a) and of multilateral negotiations, the latter are better suited to explain the reproduction of socio-cultural matrixes than their transformation.[30]

[30] Changing an institutional trajectory implies eliciting resistance from all those actors that have adapted their individual or collective strategies to the prevailing system of relations. Therefore, from an institutional perspective, changes can only be expected within the narrow tolerance range of

It should be kept in mind that while the theory and method adopted in this dissertation are rather *descriptive* (i.e. instrumental in the pursuit of interpretative aims), the overall intention of the doctoral thesis is clearly *critical*; that is, knowledge is produced with the aim of enabling emancipatory interventions in society. However, in the context of the Anthropocene – as will be discussed in greater detail in this chapter – the concept of 'emancipation' acquires new intra- and inter-generational and global dimensions. As it was at the beginning of the environmental movement in the early 1970s, it is not only about granting everyone a fair choice to participate in society anymore (i.e. achieving social *justice*), but about effectively addressing the socio-ecological *pathologies* of Western-style modern societies.

However, this PhD thesis maintains a critical-realist outlook in its core assumptions about the world (i.e. the epochal diagnosis of risk society, and in particular the validity of the scientific discourse on global environmental change). Constructivist epistemologies are in order when it comes to understanding how individuals perceive and (inter)act in response to what we have called geostorical challenges, on the basis of their individual and collective, situated, contingent, and plural experiences. The knowledge about such challenges, however, poses a kind of 'hard' benchmark, which is drawn from a non-constructivist epistemology of the material world (Latour, 2000). In this integrative framework, the 'realist' sustainability imperative works as a functional substitute of an universalist conception of morality and rationality, thus allowing for the articulation of the neo-Kantian worldview underpinning the Habermasian collective learning theory and the constructivist assumptions of the post-structuralist approach to discourse research informing SKAD. The validity of such a dual epistemological stand is discussed at length in the Excursus closing Chapter 2.

Disciplinary framing

The complexity of the thematic area outlined here, crossing sustainability governance, collective learning, discourse research, and the Anthropocene as an epochal diagnosis places this research at the crossroads between various sub-disciplines in sociology:

- Environmental sociology in terms of topical competence regarding ecologically-centered social diagnoses such as the Anthropocene and the derived 'geostorical challenges'.

established institutional structures, and therefore changes tend to be incremental, alongside a defined trajectory (Aguirre & Lo Vuolo, 2013)

- Cognitive (Eder, 2007) and cultural sociology (J. C. Alexander & Smith, 2003) regarding the actual object of observation: collective learning processes (i.e. making of meaning-structures) and the transformation discourses or utopias emerging therefrom.
- Political sociology regarding the focal concern with agency and governance.

An attempted synthesis could locate the present research at the interface of cognitive/cultural sociology (collective learning, post-structuralist discourse research) and political sociology (governance, discursive agonism) of socio-ecological change.
Furthermore, while the object of inquiry – i.e. socio-cognitive or symbolic matrixes and their practical (re)production and transformation –, as well as the theoretical and methodological framework of this dissertation remain unmistakably sociological, the research 'spark' does not stem from disciplinary research agendas or intellectual traditions, but rather from the wish to contribute to addressing the empirical challenges of a transformative agency, as well as from *transdisciplinary* academic problematizations (political ecology, ecological economics, global studies, among other fields of inquiry).

Overview of the thesis content

The dissertation is structured in three parts.
Part I progressively builds up the conceptual and theoretical frame of a collective learning approach to social-ecological transformation, and of the driving role of agency therein, focusing on the structural impairment constraining the transformative capacity of agents, and engages in theoretical exploration and hypothesis building for solutions, which are to be fleshed-out with insights gained from empirical observation in Part II.
Chapter 1 starts by introducing the state of the art in collective learning theory as a macro-theory of socio-cognitive and cultural change, and establish conceptual-theoretical linkages with the concept of social-ecological transformation. CLP theory is tested for fit regarding its ability to explain transformative action in response to geostorical challenges. The second part of the chapter introduces discourse theory as a middle-range theory operationalizing the concept of collective learning, together with a corresponding 'dramaturgical' theory, which analyzes the spatiotemporally contingent performance of discourses to explain the greater or lesser degree of world-shaping power of a discourse in a given context, as well as the reasons behind it. As a theory built on an emergentist

ontology, CLP theory, in its current state of development, largely blends out the issue of the micro-foundations of such emergence. An enlargement of CLP-theory is then proposed to account for the role of agency in fostering emergence.

Chapter 2 problematizes the social genesis of transformative agency. To this purpose, it recapitulates and tests the classical assumptions of agency-based theories of social change (as illustrated with Honneth's recognition theory) in the context of geostorical challenges, concluding that conventional assumptions of such theories face problems when stretched to account for transformative, whole-societal change. The dilemmas of *would-be*-transformative agents are theoretically worked out and systematized in a conceptual-analytical scheme, which will serve to orient the interrogation of data from the empirical case studies and frame the corresponding findings. Closing the chapter, relevant epistemological and ontological considerations regarding the theoretical framework just introduced are discussed at length.

Part I having introduced the theoretical concepts of transformation as a specific type of social change, and discourse as a specific field of struggle where the socio-cognitive and socio-cultural preconditions for a transformation are shaped (or not) through collective learning, Part II covers the analysis of empirical cases: Great Transformation and *Buen vivir*. Each chapter in this block starts with an overview of state of the art literature, and presents an account of methodological proceedings. Analysis in these three chapters yields both ideational and discursive-practical tools and docking points for strategic dialogues and coalition-building towards a greater transformative leverage of agency, drawing on an in-depth analysis of the two situated TDs. This is the place to look for detailed empirical insights.

Chapter 3 engages in exhaustive interpretative-content analysis of the GT debate. After an exploratory analysis to yield a broad picture of the field of discursive representation, fine-tuned analysis proceeds in three stages, following the SKAD- analytical framework: phenomenal or problem-structures, narratives, and frames or interpretative schemes are analyzed separately, followed by an integrative effort. The findings of this analysis are framed as building-blocks (opportunities and tools) for agential brokerage.

Chapter 4 analyses the GT debate as a discursive process. It starts with a systematic exploration of the development of the GT debate in the various relevant discursive arenas, drawing from a theoretical sample of relevant textual sources. The second part of the chapter inquiries into the performativity of the discourse around a GT by considering the relationship between representations (analyzed in Chapter 3), on the one hand, and relevant pragmatic factors (performing agents, spatial and temporal

materiality, political, economic and hermeneutic power, contingent situation, and audience response), on the other.

Chapter 5 brings on the case of Buen vivir, synthesizing both the ideational and practical dimensions of the analysis based on insights gained from secondary literature, paralleling what the two previous chapters had done with the GT-debate.

The two closing chapters forming Part III synthesize partial findings, draw empirical and conceptual insights, and develop new conceptual tools aimed at the double purpose of orienting cultural and political practice, on the one hand, and contributing to the development of theory, on the other.

Chapter 6 starts by drawing lessons from a relational (rather than strictly comparative) assessment of GT and BV, searching for generalizable insights, and for points of discursive connection and disconnection between the two, drawing on both observed empirical practice and actors' representations in both case studies. Research outcomes include typical agential configurations, agency roles, and structural enablers helping to remove, mitigate, or circumvent the structural dilemmas of 'transformative agency' identified in Chapter 2.

These findings are found to stretch the idea of 'governance' beyond its conceptual boundaries in trying to account for system-transformative interventions by 'change agents'. Chapter 7 thus explores the conceptual and practical implications of these limitations, proposing a conceptual extension I denominated 'post-governance' to cater for an ideal-typical characterization of a transformative agency. Armed with this new conceptual framework, the chapter explores the interface of post-governance with macro-political, material, and cultural structures as an exploratory assembly attempt between post-governed collective learning and a broader transformation theory, indicating avenues for further research. The chapter closes acknowledging limitations of the study and stating the general conclusions of the dissertation.

CHAPTER 1

Collective sustainability learning as pathway to a global socio-ecological transformation

Contemporary societies are now engaged in a learning race
against the speed and intensity of global environmental change
J.D.Tàbara, World Social Science Report 2013

1.1. Introductory remarks

From the epochal diagnosis and the assumptions outlined in the introduction to this dissertation, emerges a first conceptual-theoretical construct and a series of open questions that will be fleshed out throughout the present chapter, aiming at the broader goal of contributing to the further theoretical development of a sociological theory of collective learning in the scholarly context of a "transformative science" (Schneidewind, 2013b, 2015).

The chapter is structured as follows: First, the notions of *transformation* and *collective learning* will be introduced. Operating at the level of socio-cognitive and cultural structures, collective learning emerges from the diagnosis of an anthropogenic global environmental change as a necessary double moment – a deconstructive one, aimed at 'unlocking unsustainability'; and a constructive one, aimed at the expansion of cultural and political imagination – as a precondition for a global social-ecological transformation ('making sustainability'). Following, a sociological theory of collective learning will be outlined and discussed as a critical macro-theory of society with regard to currently prevalent unsustainable development trajectories. Yet a middle-rage theory is required to operationalize the otherwise almost metaphorical concept of collective learning for the purpose of applying it to empirical analysis. To this purpose, discourse and dramaturgical theoretical-methodological frameworks – accounting for discourse as representation and as practice or performance, respectively – are introduced and integrated with collective learning theory. Finally, the question of the role of *agency* in collective learning is raised. Indeed: The current scientific and political consensus acknowledging ecological sustainability as a survival imperative for the human species connotes an implicit *teleology* in this concept of collective learning, and thus raises the question of how such learning can be fostered; that is, the question of what type of agency mediates this learning process.

Our theoretical inquiry will then be resumed in Chapter 2, which further explores the question of a 'transformative agency' by inquiring into its social genesis and structural constraints in the context of the geostorical challenges of the Anthropocene.

1.2. Collective learning as macro-theory of societal change towards a social-ecological transformation

1.2.1. Transformation as a (re-)emerging sociological concept and research program

In the wake of the crisis of 'grand theory' in the social sciences, speaking of whole-societal transformation may raise some eyebrows. As Charles Tilly (1991) argues, however, the de-legitimation of the idea of a single valid logic to explain the world does not amount to abandoning the study of "huge structures and processes"; rather, it demands new frames and methods for doing so. Indeed, rather than aborting the enterprise of 'thinking big', the epochal diagnosis of the Anthropocene demands exactly the opposite: in a time of global structural crisis of coupled social and ecological systems (Gallopin, Gutman, & Malleta, 1989; Manuel- Navarrete & Buzinde, 2010; Schellnhuber & Wenzel, 1998), re-directing scholarly attention to the fundamental pillars of (dysfunctional) social organization becomes a survival imperative. (Hopkins & Wallerstein, 1996)

Furthermore, despite its current estrangement in many scholarly circles, 'transformation' is anything but a novel object of reflection and inquiry in the social sciences: In fact, in the early days of the social sciences, ideas of whole-societal transformation were all-pervasive (Westley, 2014). Sociology was born as a response to the "Great Transformation" of the day: industrialization. How and why it was happening? What fuel maintained it? How did it affect diverse groups in society and their individual members? Those were the questions driving sociological inquiry back in the 19th and early 20th centuries. In response to the challenges posed by the emerging industrial societies, diverse strands of sociological explanation and normative prescription unfolded: Marx longed for a proletarian-led revolution in response to the bourgeoise transformation, and thought it to be inevitable. For him, social analysis had the main purpose of speeding up the socialist transformation. In turn, other thinkers were concerned with the question of social order, rather than with revolution. While hard-core conservative *milieus* saw the possibility of returning to pre-industrial forms of social organization in the search for restoring order to a convulsed society, most of the sociological classics saw the answer

in 'looking forward', assisted by enlightened reason[31]: for Durkheim, the social science was objective, and could observe the world from an outsider position. Max Weber disputed this: following the hermeneutical tradition in philosophy, he deemed objectivity a mere illusion. Hence, the mission of the social sciences was to illuminate and understand the meanings, the social actions expressing those meanings, and the patterned material consequences derived from them, in particular their crystallization in the form of economic and political structures. (Westley, 2014)

Eventually, the interest in social order prevailed over the revolutionaries, and informed further sociological theorizing. Indeed, the idea disturbances to the social order (or how to prevent them) are alluded to in a more or less explicit way by classical authors such as Durkheim ('anomia'); Weber ('residual irrationality'); Luhmann ('operational closure'); or Habermas ('colonized life-worlds'). However, the quest for the preservation of order comes at a cost, namely that of *foreclosing alternative futures*. This should not be read – at least not yet, at this level of theoretical abstraction – through the lens of a postcolonial 'hermeneutics of suspicion': indeed, the very vital possibility of even making some sense of the world in its constant state of flux requires restricting the flow of endless possibilities, and this implies that some of the complexity of existing knowledges, narratives, and voices necessarily get lost in the process. This is inevitable and even necessary a precondition for the maintenance of the integrity of the social bond (Eder, 2014). Yet this cannot be conflated with the systematic exclusion, marginalization, or banalization of particular knowledges and their social carriers. As shown in the preceding paragraphs, the prioritization of scholarly interest in order and stability instead of that in societal transformation is a historically contingent phenomenon, which comes with institutional conformity-pressure in the academia, in politics, and society. In other words, it is intersected by power-vectors, as theorized by Foucault with his concept of power-knowledge regimes.

But any established order remains provisional, and susceptible of being challenged and changed. In *geostorical* times, the question of fundamental societal transformation is certain to become central, once more, both in scholarly inquiry and in socio-cultural and political praxis. Not closing, but opening alternative futures is the call of the hour. "Succinctly, if we are at risk of self-destruction, we need to reinvent ourselves ontologically" (Fry 2012, cited in Escobar, 2013, p. 9). Technological and

[31] Under the label of 'enlightened reason', what is meant is a transcendentalist and substantive understanding of 'reason' which up until today informs the positivist tradition in the social sciences. The Kantian tradition understands reason as a categorical norm-generator, while the Utilitarian tradition sees reason as an unchangeable yardstick for instrumental means-ends decision-making.

increasingly also social innovation are ubiquitously stimulated as a way to carve new paths forward. Yet the transformation to sustainability is not only a matter of finding new ways, but also – first and foremost, perhaps – of undoing old unsustainable ways (Shove, 2010b). The social-ecological transformation (SET) is a *deconstructive* moment, as much as it is a moment of innovation. Better: it requires a deconstructive moment *before* it can effectively yield a constructive one. Arguably, the tragedy of Western-style modern societies is not the lack of alternative – fairer and sustainable – ways of socio-economic organization, but rather its (infra)structural path-dependency on old, unsustainable production and consumption matrixes, as well as on the accompanying cultural schemata and the thereof derived meaning-structures (Welzer, 2011). The logical inference which follows is that *innovation* is not the main key to a sustainable world, as long as innovations continue to be accommodated to the prevailing cultural matrix. Boaventura de Sousa Santos puts it eloquently: "there are enough alternatives out there; what is lacking are *alternative ways of looking at alternatives*"[32] (my emphasis). Hence, insofar the deconstruction of the current unsustainable social order is a prerequisite for the construction of a new sustainable social order, *change* takes precedence over *order* – at least in the chronological sense. Undoing unsustainability becomes a precondition for doing sustainability.

With this double-aim at heart, Transformation research can draw from a rich pool of theoretical and methodological approaches and concepts, ranging from complex systems- and structural theories, cultural theories, as well as theories based on agency and action. Critical transformation scholars would emphasize social relations and processes, power- and property-structures, conflict, and domination/hegemony, usually drawing on Marx, Gramsci, and Polanyi; while scholars closer to modernization theory tend to resort to Durkheim, Schumpeter, or Parsons, and see functional differentiation, modernization and evolution/development concepts as critical to transformations. For their part, (non-idealist) cultural and agency-based approaches – on which this doctoral thesis largely draws – are closer to the Weberian and eventually the Critical tradition in the social sciences. In times characterized by ambivalence, rapid change, and mounting uncertainty, the co-existence of multiple (even contradictory) approaches in dialogue with each other should come as no surprise, and should rather be expected to become the norm in research on socio-ecological transformation. (Brand, 2014d)

Yet the risk is that – by lack of a condensed theoretical framework for the study of social-ecological transformations (integrating questions of process, action, power, structure, culture, and agency in their

[32] Retrieved from http://alice.ces.uc.pt/en/ on 18.07.2016

changing mutual feedback loops) – substantively novel empirical phenomena are filtered through and accommodated to fit well-worn theoretical and methodological lenses: the object is thus adapted to the instrument, instead of the reverse. It goes without saying (and here the point of critiques of 'grand theory' is acknowledged) that – given the complexity, sophistication, and veering character of *society* (and, therefore, of societal change) as an object of theorizing – such integrated 'transformation theory' cannot be expected to sketch out more than general, typical premises and statements, and the designation of some key factors (Reißig, 2014, p. 92). Yet there is much which speaks for the development of such integrated "transformation paradigm": the need for answers to critical questions such as what, why, and how, as well as the changes in meanings and material consequences of the fundamental transformations of our time, together with increasingly acknowledged as indispensable inter-disciplinary dialogue and learning among the social and human sciences (Brand, 2014d; Hackmann & St. Claire, 2012; Mauser et al., 2013). While necessarily much narrower in ambition, both the research questions and the theoretical framework of this doctoral thesis have been developed with the aim of contributing to this broader theoretical puzzle, i.e. as a sociological contribution to the development of an overarching transformation theory.

In the presence of geostorical threats, however, descriptive theoretical efforts shedding light on the *how* of change amount to only half of the job: answers regarding the *direction* of change are equally needed, that is, knowledge that yields normative orientations for action[33] and enables the evaluation of unfolding changes as positive or negative. In other words, what is needed is a *theory of social learning* capable of passing judgement on evolutionary events and processes.

It should be noted that while 'change' merely denotes a (normatively neutral) alteration in a relatively stable order of things, 'learning' and 'evolution[34]' connote an implicit *teleology*, which has made them the target of critique as a form of Western ideology, particularly when conceptualized in terms of 'progress' or 'development' – including sustainable development (see Introductory chapter).

[33] In this sense, current transformation research distinguishes between *transformation science* (descriptive of actually occurring transformation processes) and *transformative science* (triggering transformation processes) (Schneidewind, 2013b; WBGU, 2011)

[34] The term 'evolution' was adopted from the natural sciences – especially from Darwin's theory of evolution – by the mainstream of intellectuals in the human and social disciplines in the 19th Century. Yet unlike natural (genetic evolution), social evolution depends – among other things – on how culture evolves (epigenetic evolution), and the idea of cultural evolution implies a theory of collective learning, which explains the way in which culture changes. (Eder, 1999)

Therefore, it should be stressed right from the outset that the use of the terms 'learning' and 'evolution' in the framework of this thesis does not amount to endorsing any form of universalist theory that sees an upward trend in the historical direction of social change, or that sets given patterns (e.g. towards greater functional differentiation) as a necessary evolutionary feature[35]. Yet it does retain a certain teleological flavor in that it sets the preservation of the integrity of the biosphere – which constitutes a survival imperative for the human and most other living species on this planet – as the benchmark against which to measure the adequacy or inadequacy of trends in societal change. The sustainability imperative can thus be safely considered as a benchmark against which to test any possible culturally elaborated or politically agreed-upon "desired futures"[36].

It should be noted then that, despite drawing on (and adapting, where required) a general concept and theory for collective learning, conceptual definitions and theoretical claims in the framework of this dissertation will be limited to collective learning processes with reference to a social-ecological transformation, as conceptualized above (abbreviated hereinafter: *transformative learning*). The precise conceptual contours of this particular type of learning and its operationalization for empirical research will be attempted after considering more general features (and problems) of collective learning in general.

1.2.2. Collective learning as a precondition for a social-ecological transformation

There is a rapidly accumulating body of literature on social learning towards a sustainability transformation. Ironically, however, a properly *sociological* theory of social learning is virtually absent from this burgeoning discussion[37]. Such sociological theory of collective learning (hereinafter CLP

[35] As will be shown in Chapter 3, for example, the emphasis on the communal and the 'commons' (as a form of collective property and/or usage) in the GT debate as a driver towards the sustainability transformation speaks for a transition from prevalently *gesellschaftliche* towards re-emerging *gemeinschaftliche* forms of organization of collective life, thus challenging Durkheimian assumptions about increasing specialization as a necessary feature of evolution in modern societies.

[36] This statement should not be read as a naturalistic retour. Naturalism seeks to provide explanatory accounts of social evolution based on naturalistic premises. Setting the preservation of natural life-support systems as a benchmark for social evolution, however, is indeed a (hardly a disputable) normative choice, but certainly not a naturalistic one.

[37] By way of example, overview studies such as *What is social learning?* (Reed et al., 2010) or else the collection of essays *Social Learning Towards a Sustainable World* (Wals, 2009) retrieved texts from organizational studies, innovation studies, etc., but no sociological account binding these micro-/

theory) was in fact developed in Germany in the 1970s and 1980s, mainly by Max Miller and Klaus Eder (Pelfini, 2005). While initially rooted in the cognitivist-psychological tradition of James M. Baldwin, Jean Piaget, and Lawrence Kohlberg, it later developed into a properly sociological approach merging the interpretative traditions of Alfred Schutz, Erwin Goffman, and Harold Garfinkel, on the one hand, and the Habermasian theory of Communicative Action, on the other (Eder, 2007). However, this theoretical enterprise was later largely discontinued due to difficulties in operationalization and in finding a suitable way of circumventing issues of veiled normativity embedded in its generative philosophical matrix (Eder, 2014). Piecemeal efforts have been undertaken later to bridge these issues and further develop the theory (i.a. Eder, 1999, 2007; Forchtner & Schneickert, 2016; Krügger, 2012; Pelfini, 2005, 2007). A reformulated version of collective learning theory appeared recently (Forchtner et al., 2018), after the defense of this PhD thesis, and is thus not accounted for in my line of argumentation.

Part of the difficulty lies in the understanding of the concept of 'learning' itself (let alone 'collective learning'!). Indeed, an overview of the relevant literature reveals a variety of possible understandings of 'learning'[38]. These understandings vary according to diverging conceptualizations regarding mainly the subject (individuals, organizations, networks, institutions), the object (substantive knowledge about the world versus cultural or social meaning-structures), and the nature of the process of learning (e.g. diffusion versus emergence). Some particularly relevant features of this kaleidoscope of learning-conceptions will be discussed in the next section. In addition, these diverse understandings are informed by equally diverse (even divergent) epistemological and ontological presuppositions: some classical conceptions see social learning as a linear ascension path towards moral universalism (in the ethical tradition of Hegel and Herder) or the technological mastery of nature (in the rationalist

meso-perspectives together is provided. In the concluding section, Reed et al.'s critical review article, aimed at summarizing and clarifying conceptualizations of social learning currently relevant in sustainability-related research, comes up with something closer to a sociological definition: "social learning may be defined as a change in understanding that goes beyond the individual to become situated within wider social units or communities of practice through social interactions between actors within social networks". (Reed et al., 2010), yet no corresponding theoretical development is provided.

[38] For a thorough account, comparison, and discussion of each of these approaches, see, *inter alia* Eder (1999, 2007) and Pelfini (2005)

tradition of Descartes and Bacon). These so-called 'evolutionist' perspectives clash with pluralist modern and post-modern conceptions emphasizing socio-historical embeddedness and the contingent and reversible[39] character of learning. Rationalist conceptions explain learning as the aggregated effect of individual learning based either on axiomatic assumptions about human cognitive capacities (be they transcendentalist, as in the Kantian philosophical tradition; or utilitarian, as in the rational choice tradition), or on naturalist premises (e.g. the cognitive-psychological tradition of Baldwin, Piaget, and Kohlberg). Their fundamental differences notwithstanding, what all these approaches have in common is that – against classical behaviorist approaches assuming an immediate linkage between external stimulus and response – they privilege the cognitive ability of humans (individual and/or collectively) to produce structured images about the world as the cornerstone of their ensuing theoretical explanations of human sociality and of individual and social action.

Miller (1986) and especially Eder (1985, 1999, 2007) engaged in the theoretically difficult task of outlining and delimiting an empirically-based and properly sociological theory of collective learning. In light of my research questions and goals, engaging in this theoretical debate here would be of little relevance. Instead, I will outline the contours of Eder's theory – the sociological theory on collective learning which is most compatible with the epistemological and ontological assumptions in my conceptual and theoretical working-framework – and problematize it in light of the referred research questions and goals, thereby indirectly advancing theorization in this field.

The work of Eder was particularly concerned with the historical and epistemological contextualization of the concept of (collective) learning, seeking to distance it from Parsonian-functionalist, rationalistic, individualistic, and naturalistic explanations of the social bond and of their respectively envisaged mechanisms of social evolution. Instead, Eder brought collective learning closer to a culturalist-interactionist perspective, integrating the Habermasian and the symbolic-interactionist tradition, as represented mainly by Aaron Cicourel (1963, cited in Eder, 2007) and Ervin Goffman (1974, 1983). From a rational-choice perspective, the social bond is the result of a rational consensus towards the establishment of norms that would stabilize the social environment, thus enabling means-ends calculations on the part of egoistic subjects. Culturalist conceptions view such assumptions as

[39] Indeed, as the quasi-apocalyptic warfare of the 20th Century has demonstrated, social learning is anything but non-reversible (Eder, 1985; Pelfini, 2005). Similarly, the hitherto successful cultural model of Western-style modernization may have just turned into a "doomsday model" (Beck) as a result of the generalization of self-engendered systemic risks, with the diagnosis of the Anthropocene as its apotheosis.

unwarranted, emphasizing the symbolic nature of the social bond, instead. From this perspective, instrumental reasoning is explained as a particular case of meaningful action, among other possibilities. For their part, individualist and naturalist conceptions pose a direct correspondence between subjective and collective learning, which is questioned by (symbolic-)interactionist perspectives that see collective learning as an emergent effect[40] of social (symbolic) interaction, rather than a sum of increments in individual knowledge stocks.

In fact, Eder's theory builds on Goffman's late concept of "interaction order" (Goffman, 1983) as a conceptual cornerstone. With this concept, Goffman refers to concrete networked interaction among actors, which in turn yields certain shared socio-cognitive structures, that is: shared meaning-structures configuring a hermeneutical horizon through which actors make sense of the world. I will hereinafter refer to this as *symbolic order*[41]. Goffman thus showed that, behind the conscious normative order of the social world (which constitutes the theoretical point of departure for rationalists), there exists a world that we take for granted, which works as a precondition for the existence and functioning of the former: the cognitive or symbolic world[42]. Empirically, it can be verified that social interaction continues even in the event of rules being breached – in fact, rule-breaching is an everyday occurrence in social life. Instead, social life is not possible in the absence of a shared cognitive or symbolic universe which provides the basic instructions for individuals to make sense of the world and engage with it.

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[40] The concept of *emergence* refers to the self-organization of a system of interconnected, relatively simple elements to form a more complex system, with new properties and improved adaptation capacities. Its roots lie with the General Systems Theory, Complexity theory, and Chaos Theory. These theoretical strands provide general guidelines to the concept. In the social sciences, the concept of 'emergence' is a latecomer. Ernst Bloch (1995) was a forerunner with the concept of the "not yet" existent (see Chapter 2). Even though it never acquired paradigmatic status, the presence of emergence theory (under diverse labels) in several areas of social thought can be traced long back in history. An example is the sociology of collective action (e.g. Turner & Kilian 1957), the sociology of social movements, the sociology of disasters (e.g. D. Wenger 1978); the sociology of flows (J. Urry; S. Lash, M. Castells; A. Mol; J. Law), and environmental sociology (Hannigan).

[41] For the sake of terminological unambiguity, the term 'symbolic order' was preferred to 'narrative order' (Eder), since the term "narrative" constitutes an operational methodological concept in this dissertation (Keller, 2011). The term 'symbolic order' was also privileged for reasons of versatility – especially in establishing a clearer bridge to Foucault, whose notion of discourse I will seek to integrate to the collective learning framework.

[42] In its functional role of enabling social interaction, the symbolic world is analogous to what in the phenomenological tradition (and later taken up by Habermas) came to be known as the 'life-world', or, more generally, a shared phenomenological horizon.

Hence, unlike normative expectations, cognitive presuppositions are not amenable to negotiation. Abiding by the non-written rules of this symbolic order is a precondition to being accepted as a valid interlocutor, as a member of society: "If you break norms, you are sanctioned; if you break cognitive presuppositions, you are excluded as a stranger or a psychopath" (Eder, 2007, p. 397).

Furthermore, and despite not having actually been agreed upon in the sense of the "social contract" metaphor, this symbolic world is still a rule-governed (though not rule-oriented) world; i.e. it has a structured order, which is constantly maintained-reproduced-transformed in the course of (meaningful) human interaction. Such interaction is, in turn, guided by the cognitive rules embedded in the prevailing symbolic order.

From a sociological perspective, the question then arises of how can these symbolic orders (and their changes) can be empirically studied. Goffman came up with a methodological concept to study symbolic orders: he called it 'frame analysis' (Goffman, 1974). Yet unlike Eder and Miller, Goffman did not take interest in the question of how frames change as a result of ongoing interaction. Another possible answer is that the symbolic order of human sociability is rendered visible through patterns of social identity-building, which enables mutual recognition among social actors (i.a. Honneth, 1992). Hence, the study of identitary boundaries and their evolution would be one possible access point to the study of the structures of the socio-cognitive world and their evolution, which is the path chosen by Eder in his later work (see for example Eder, 2000, 2006, 2009)

More generally, it can be said that the coordination of cognitive worlds ensues through a variety of cognitive devices (such as thematic frames, identity patterns, and categorial schemes) transported into communicative interaction situations mainly through narratives[43]. Over time, identity claims (as thematized by the literature on New Social Movements) and cognitive claims (the object of inter-cultural and partly also of decolonial studies) mark turning points in the flow of narratives which make up the symbolic structure, introducing variability into what is otherwise a stable order. Such cognitive and identity claims arise in moments of crisis, when the taken-for-granted-world is questioned, and open up new paths of normality basing on a symbolic or *cognitive project* (Eder, 1999), that is, on the

[43] The 'narrative turn' in the social sciences increasingly led to an understanding of social orders as narratively-constituted structures since the 1970s-1980s. The concept of narrative can be here broadly equated with that of 'story'. It is through narratives that we come to know, understand, and make sense of the social world, and it is through narratives and that we constitute our social identities (Ricoeur, 1991; Somers, 1994)

selective retelling of stories and the selective mobilization of frames, images, etc. related to such narratives (Eder, 1999; Tilly, 2002).

It is through cognitive projects that the *agential dimension* in the evolution of symbolic orders comes to the fore. Through such cognitive projects, agents seek to transform the prevailing symbolic order as a way to allow for broader opportunities for recognition and for making sense of the world. Yet cognitive projects necessarily remain embedded in a broader (and relatively stable) symbolic order, which renders the former more or less likely to succeed in establishing meaning[44], and its potential impacts weaker or stronger in terms of reproducing/ transforming that very symbolic order. The concept of cognitive project will be equated here with that of *discourse*, and the situated performance of discourses in social praxis will be analyzed in terms of a *dramaturgy,* following in the footsteps of Goffman and J.C. Alexander (see Chapter 2). This theoretical construct builds on the fundamental assumption that changes in social structures result from a co-evolutionary, dialectical process between cultural and material dimensions, rather than seeking to explain either one as an epiphenomenon of the other (J. C. Alexander, 2005; Eder, 1999, 2007). Eder usefully summarizes this dialectical relation using a cognitivist metaphor: the social relations (and the material structures into which they crystalize) can be equated to the 'social brain', while the socio-cognitive or cultural structures constitute the 'social mind'. Analytically, they are two different categories, though they cannot be empirically separated.

It is discursive representations and their concrete dramatization which are the object of observation in the framework of this dissertation. The dramaturgies of interest to this research are the cultural and political deliberative processes around alternative futures, anchored in concrete networks of persons and organizations, artifacts (e.g. publications, research and political programs, funding lines, etc.), and practices (e.g. protests, research collaborations, alternative everyday-life practicalities, etc.) which are found in the empirical case-studies. The discourses of interest are the cognitive projects or representations emerging from such deliberative processes. In analogy with Eder's metaphor, dramaturgies play out in the realm of the social 'brain', while discourses remit to the social 'mind'. In processes of discursive reproduction, the force of the symbolic order is displayed. Conversely, discursive struggle signals a situation of crisis, of discontinuity in the course of time (Eder, 2006), and

[44] The relative compatibility of the cognitive project at hand with the prevailing symbolic order, and thus its likelihood of success, is referred to by Eder as 'narrative plausibility' of the project (Eder, 2006)

– as argued below - opens up a structural window of opportunity for individual and collective learning processes to unfold.

In the mode of a summary of this section, and before going into deeper theoretical reflection and problematization of the sociological theory of collective learning, a systematic justification of why such theory is relevant in the framework of this dissertation is in order. Three different underpinning arguments can be distinguished:

Substantive argument: As with any theory, the validity of CLP theory is dependent upon its adequacy vis-à-vis the empirical object it seeks to understand/explain (see epistemological considerations in the Excursus at the end of this chapter). In *geostorical* times (Chakrabarty, 2009; Latour, 2014), a notion of *telos* of learning is required, which here can be re-interpreted as worldwide politically agreed upon 'transformation' of Western-style production, consumption, and disposal patterns. For the reasons presented in the Introductory chapter, this amounts to a new "Great Transformation" of Polanyian scale of Euro-Atlantic modernity, even if all specific features of such 'transformation' cannot possibly be known beforehand.

Pragmatic argument: CLP theory offers a sound theory of change compatible with the empirical object under study, that is: cognitive (i.e. discursive) projects. In addition, a CLP theory helps approach this object of study in as concrete a way as possible: by observing changes in communicative and discursive-dramaturgical interaction. Keeping things concrete here is important, since when the talk is about whole-societal change, the assumption of the possibility of a second-order observation (i.e. of an outsider position observing and assessing such change) becomes more problematic than ever.

Scholarly argument: 'social learning' being an emerging concept in social-scientific sustainability-related research, a sociological theory of collective learning comes-in timely to engage in discussion with other conceptions.

1.2.3. Theoretical considerations around collective learning

Following Eder (1999, 2007) and Pelfini (2005, 2010), I will define collective learning as an emergent, (de)constructive process through which the symbolic-cognitive-narrative scaffolding that people use

to interpret the world and communicate with each other is altered, opening up the scope and span of what can be deemed desirable, possible or even thinkable[45].

This definition opens up an array of questions which require being addressed for a proper understanding of the conceptual-theoretical specificities and of the value-added of collective learning in the context of this dissertation. An accurate account of the defining features of this collective learning theory can be achieved through exploring the structuring questions the concept of learning gives rise to: the preconditions for learning (*when* learning takes place); the subject of learning (*who* learns), the object of learning (*what* is learned), the process of learning (*how* it is learned). What follows is a summary presentation of the conceptual and theoretical groundings of collective learning theory and their contextualization (problematization) in the light of geostorical challenges.

In view of the peculiarity of a sustainability-oriented learning process, namely: its *intentional* character, one further key question can be raised: *who can trigger* CLPs opening up socio-cognitive and cultural perspectives towards a 'Great Transformation'?

The first of the questions posed above – *when* learning comes about – refers to the enabling structural preconditions for collective learning. The theory says collective learning happens in situations in which interaction processes yield modifications of collectively shared knowledge (e.g. a situation of clash of diverse cultural models or *epistemes*, as we will see in the case of the *Buen vivir* discourse, but also, in a less straightforward fashion, in the GT debate). Mutual understanding of the respective symbolic universes cannot be taken for granted anymore, and symbolic identification needs to be actively restored[46]. Learning thus emerges out of a juncture of uncertainty, of a situation where the normal state of (symbolic) order is interrupted (Siegenthaler 1993, cited in Eder, 1999). This theoretical claim

[45] This disruptive character of the concept of collective learning is emphasized in other denominations, such as "transgressive learning"(Lotz-Sisitka, Wals, Kronlid, & McGarry, 2015). Yet while they may add value in terms of conceptual distinctiveness in the face of too broad an array of existent learning-conceptions, such terminological innovations fall short of theoretical depth. I will therefore stick to the term 'collective learning' and its theoretical baggage.

[46] This proactive character of the learning process already suggests the intentionality at work in the very genesis of collective learning processes. This does not amount to saying that CLPs (or social evolution, for that matter) can be deliberately triggered, steered, or controlled. But it does highlight a dimension of collective learning which is largely overlooked in the theoretical current in which CLP theory is inscribed. I will come back to this in the following section, to elaborate on the key role of agency in 'transformative' learning processes.

is widely supported by historical evidence, particularly, in our domain of inquiry, by the study of the 'great transformations' of the past:

> The history of transformations, especially the road to industrialization, teaches that conditions of evolutionary openness were most favorable to innovation. It was a combination of fragmentation, the absence of central control, facilitated communication and the chance of continuity, which led to industrialization. Perhaps these are also the conditions that favor a transition to a sustainable future (Sieferle, 2010, p. 26).

A learning society is a society in a state of painful transition. Hence, it should be expected that societies tend to resist learning, so that learning processes only unfold when forced by traumatic socio-historical circumstances. In terms of the epochal diagnosis on which this research piece bases, the implication is that, Beck's "risk society" – a society fundamentally characterized by its self-engendered existential risks – is, by implication, a learning-prone society (Beck, 2016; Eder, 1999).

Due to the exceptionality of the preconditions required for successful collective learning, it needs to be stated *a priori* that collective learning is, correspondingly, an exceptional instance in social evolution. Yet its critical importance as a survival imperative in the context of geostorical challenges make their study not only worthwhile, but straightforwardly unavoidable.

The question of *who learns* remits to the issue of the articulation of social developments between the micro-meso-macro levels of society. In social theory three broad positions regarding the subject of learning can be identified[47]: 1) individuals learn; 2) relations/ networks learn (with a greater or lesser degree of institutionalization); and 3) autopoietic social systems learn (i.e. macro-developments have no micro-foundations).

From Parsons to Habermas, the dominant explanation for socio-historical evolution was ontogenetic, i.e. it relied on individualistic understandings of learning, while later prevailing theoretical strands leave individualistic assumptions aside and presuppose an interactionist learning-mechanism, i.e. a sociogenic explanation for social evolution: learning emerges out of the dynamic relationships among more or less organized individuals. Yet this leaves a broad range of possible learning-subjects, ranging from interpersonal learning networks, through organizations (organizational learning[48]), to

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[47] For a lengthy discussion on these diverse theoretical perspectives, see (Eder, 1999)

[48] Organizational learning is conceived as the process of adapting to evolving environments through complexity and uncertainty reduction, as a tool for the survival of the organization. This focus on self-preservation and the conception of the world as an analytically out-bracketed "environment" clearly deviates from the conception of learning that is of interest to this research work. Hence, this 'cybernetic' conception of learning (Pelfini, 2005) will be hereinafter excluded from consideration.

institutions, and societies as a whole (social or cultural learning[49]). According to the above definitions, our focus here is on how inter-personal and organizational networks and their cognitive projects may eventually influence re-articulations at the level of socio-cognitive and cultural structures, as observable in the pluralization of the discourse on sustainable development (SD) (see Introductory chapter). The peculiarity of this discursive field[50] is double: in ideational terms, it traverses arguably every aspect of the organization of modern societies; in pragmatic-material terms, it spans across a wide spectrum of their cultural and (sub)political institutional infrastructure. This is to say that the phenomenon observed is arguably to be situated at the meso-societal level, with potential projection onto the macro-level. Hence the discursive field of SD goes well beyond the realm of an expert or special-arena discourse, as Foucault understood the term, and rather pertains to the general organization of society. It follows that discursive change in the field of SD is an asymptotic *proxy* for cultural learning. Pelfini (2005) has also located collective learning distinctively at the interface between the meso- and the macro-level of society, yet placing greater emphasis on how learning is mirrored in the evolution of formal institutions – or their less stabilized surrogates, which he refers to as 'institutional arrangements'. Similarly, from the perspective of Sociological New Institutionalism, Krügger (2012) sees institutionally mediated collective learning as a two-way process of bottom-up crystallization of emergent socio-cognitive and moral patterns, on the one hand, and a top-down diffusion from established institutions, on the other. In view of the barely incipient formal institutionalization of the discursive change processes in the empirical case-studies at hand, however, I will rather look at institutions in their constraining role, as inertial, self-stabilizing, and self-reproducing formalized entities or socio-cultural patterns. In turn, I will rather conceive of *networks* as

[49] Cultural learning refers here to the cognitive and normative rules that govern inter-organizational communication/ coordination: basically, a moral order (embodied in an institutional order) and a symbolic-cognitive space (that defines how information is to be interpreted, codified and classified). Eder (1999) refers to this as 'institutional learning'. Yet for the sake of unambiguity, as in other authors (for example Hajer, 1995; Pelfini, 2005, 2012), as well as in lay language, the term 'institution' is usually conflated with a narrower understanding as *formal* institutions (such as marriage, the school, or the state), I prefer using the more general concept of "cultural learning". The term 'institution', in turn, will be reserved for the narrower understanding of relatively formalized socio-cultural patterns or entities.

[50] A precise conceptualization of the terms 'discourse' and 'discursive field' is provided in Section 1.3 of this chapter

the subject of collective learning[51]. This is, of course, a heuristic rather than a theoretical distinction: It goes without saying that, as these emergent CLPs unfold, formal institutions might be transformed. Moreover, a stable structure is as much enabling as it is constraining of agency and, therefore, of learning (Giddens' 'duality of structure'). But heuristically separating the 'enabling' and the 'constraining' features of institutions when it comes to collective learning is in the interest of a clearer and pertinent conceptual-analytical device, hence I will conceive of *networks as learning subject within a given institutional framework*.

The third question, which pertains the object of learning (i.e. *what* is learned), has largely been answered through the above considerations regarding the learning subject. As mentioned above, the perspective of symbolic interactionism, which lies at the foundation of CLP theory, not only assumes an interactionist grammar for collective learning, but further withdraws (idealized) rationalist assumptions: as defined here, collective learning is not mainly about the collective accumulation of substantive empirical knowledge or about adaptation to complex and changing environments, but rather about the transformations that interaction process yield at the level of socio-cognitive and cultural 'deep structures', i.e. transformations in the shared symbolic order. Hence, a collective learning theory is not primarily a theory about the accumulation of substantive or empirical knowledge(s)[52] about the world, but rather "a theory of organization and reorganization of [socio-cognitive and therefore pre-normative] rule-systems for the accumulation of knowledge" (Eder, 1999, p. 45); i.e. a theory that sheds light into how substantive or empirical knowledge is culturally metabolized or made sense of. In other words, a collective learning theory looks at the socio-cognitive structures regulating the genesis, stabilization and transformation of *meaning*. By implication, this includes how substantive knowledge is produced, which knowledge is validated and which is rendered invisible, etc.

The above said notwithstanding, the question of how accumulating substantial knowledge about the world and the socio-cognitive or cultural rules to make sense of it are intertwined is one of utter relevance from the perspective of the necessary social-ecological transformation. More specifically,

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[51] The question about what the particular nodes in such networks (persons, organizations) is one to be answered through empirical inquiry.

[52] A further terminological digression pertains the concept of 'knowledge': whereas Eder builds up a binomial opposition between 'culture' and 'knowledge', where the former refers to the cognitive/symbolic scaffolding of interactively generated representations of the world and the latter to the concrete contents with which the aforementioned structure is populated, in the Foucauldian universe the term 'knowledge' is used more broadly to encompass both the above dimensions. This distinction is bridged here by referring to knowledge in the sense of Eder as "substantive knowledge".

one could ask: where does the actual stuff fueling symbolic interaction (out of which learning results) come from? This question has hitherto had a default answer: it comes from history, i.e. it is our accumulated collective experience which provides the stuff, that is, the substantial empirical knowledge which we collectively reflect upon (Eder, 1985), including our factual knowledge about the world. Collective learning would thus consist in the constant re-elaboration of such knowledges and experiences in the light of new upcoming evidence, seeking to accommodate the latter to the sedimented deep structures (i.e. the prevalent symbolic order), whenever possible, and to adjust the latter to the former, when not.

As argued in the Introductory chapter, however, learning from the repository available in history – i.e. the realm of social existence – implies a waste of social experience and representations which lurk in the realm of the socially inexistent. This insight cannot be dismissed as trivial vis-à-vis the idea of learning from history, as it has analytically distinct implications: indeed, the research-lens needs tailoring for exploring the realm of 'non-existence', which typically includes *what history excludes* – not only what did happen and was omitted due to historiographical bias, but also that which never actually crystallized into social structures, and could yet be relevant to present queries. Furthermore, the realm of non-existence also includes what is *not yet*, i.e. what is currently in the process of emerging into the realm of existence (Bloch, 1995; Santos, 2004)[53]. Furthermore, the anticipation of potential future risks to orient current transformative action implies an exercise in vivid anticipatory consciousness, implying that we also need to develop the capacity to *'learn from the future'* (WBGU, 2011); and this implies not only gaining substantial knowledge or information to orient action from scientific projections, but that the future become a driver of cultural and identitary processes, as well[54]. This presents the learning subject with a capital challenge, as argued in Chapter 2.

One key question, however, remains hitherto unraised: the question of why certain configurations of meaning/ knowledge happen to prevail over others. Answering this question requires investigating the *power-dimension* implicit in cultural schemata and social relationships of knowledge, as did Foucault. CLP theory, however, does not provide conceptual or methodological tools to investigate the power-dimension of knowledge, hence there is need for complementing it with a middle-range theory which

[53] An in-depth discussion on the space of social non-existence as a spring for learning is offered in Chapter 2

[54] Consider here, by way of illustration, the notions of a *species identity* (Chakrabarty, 2009) or else a global *community of fate* (Beck, 2010; Held & Hervey, 2009), or the various discursive traditions on cosmopolitism.

does. For this purpose, Chapter 2 introduces discourse research as a heuristic tool for the study of emerging transformative learning processes. The question of how social relationships of knowledge enable or block collective learning processes leads to our third question: the question about the process by which learning occurs, i.e. the *how* of learning.

Collective learning theory being rooted in the symbolic interactionist tradition, it necessarily goes beyond assumptions of a substantive meaning of action towards the way in which such meaning is generated in the course of ongoing action and interaction. Learning thus cannot be regarded as the outcome of any particular argumentative interaction (e.g. a particular deliberation or a negotiation), but rather as an emergent phenomenon from a continuous stream of interaction, whose outcome is not a rational consensus among the participants, but rather a sense of collective identification; not a shared *normative* horizon – a 'social contract', in the rationalist sense of a deliberate agreement of individual members of a society –, but a shared hermeneutic or *phenomenological* horizon (which translates into, but cannot be reduced to, a shared normative horizon or moral order). Add the dimension of structure, and this phenomenological horizon becomes a symbolic order.

Now, when are changes in the symbolic order to be regarded as *learning*? From the point of view of narrative structures, collective learning can be said to be dependent upon the open-endedness of stories, i.e. upon the possibility of further developing, contesting, or modifying the stories that make up the symbolic order – the contrary, i.e. the dogmatic or ideological closure of narratives (as with the infamous yet very much current Thatcherian TINA-narrative: "there is no alternative"), confronts learning with a blind alley (Eder, 2014). A logical inference from the above is that discursive *pluralization* constitutes a precondition to maximize the chances of "fundamental learning" (Miller, 1986) through an enlargement of available symbolic docking-points, that is, offering a multiplicity of possible continuations for current narratives.

Two issues arise from the above. First, just as social change cannot be engineered, symbolic structures are not manipulable at will (neither individually nor collectively). The fixation with individual, organizational and even institutional learning as the driver of social change is a misleading illusion of late modernity, and amounts to reproducing individualist and rationalist assumptions at higher levels of aggregation. In other words, neither individual nor collective learning processes – even if successful – translate directly and immediately into social change. It is rather the systemic impacts – the way in which interactively generated learning 'echoes' or resonates with macro-societal and macro-historical constellations – which engender social change and thus mark the path of social evolution (Eder, 1999). In that sense, "collective learning processes compete with stable power structures, sedimented

customary practices and dominant relations of production" as drivers of change (Pelfini, 2005, p. 46). Collective learning, then, does not produce change itself, but rather produces the repertoire of cultural variability required for social change to take place. It is a necessary though not a sufficient condition for social change.

But even if subscribing this theoretical explanation in principle, it soon becomes apparent from the observation of history that social evolution has been unevenly impacted by various more or less deliberate cultural 'inputs' or practices of "ontological design" (Escobar, 2011). Obviously, certain cognitive or symbolic projects have had a greater influence in the course of historic evolution than others. This can surely not be attributed to power differentials alone; rather, the variegated creative individual and collective (re)appropriations of the world encounter greater or lesser resonance in a given social context, for a variety of reasons. But, as was the case with the power-dimension of knowledge, this largely falls out of CLP's theoretical span. One probable reason for this can be derived from the paradigmatic positioning of CLP-theory in the field of social theory. Indeed, Eder's interactive-emergentist thesis is to be read in the context of a theoretical debate with the rationalist paradigm, which sees social change as overdetermined by individual choices informed by instrumental rationality. In this sense, the symbolic-interactionist perspective informing Eder's theory provides a sensible, balancing contribution. Yet with the emphasis placed on emergence, the question of the creativity potential of social actors to influence socio-cultural change (even if they cannot possibly control it) slips out of focus and remains unaddressed. As said before, there is no comprehensive theory outlining 'success factors' for deliberately triggering or steering social change, broadly defined – let alone a whole-societal transformation. Nevertheless, alongside Goffmann's dramaturgical strand of analysis, I will argue that social interaction can be analyzed as a series of deliberate performances of cultural meaning, whose outcome is anything but random (or 'self-organizing'). Furthermore, following J.C. Alexander (2004), it can be argued that the success or failure of such performances – even if not translating directly into societal change – do have practical consequences and can thus 'push' the whole dialectical circle of learning and change in a specific direction. As will be shown in Chapters 4 and 5, however, the success of a cultural performance depends on a variety of controllable and non-controllable factors. Furthermore, social (let alone socio-ecological) systems are complex entities, hence not all relevant factors can be identified or properly understood. In that sense, Eder's 'emergentist' thesis holds full relevance. Yet insofar deliberately fostering a social-ecological transformation constitutes a survival imperative in the current *geostorical* context, it is worth enquiring deeper into how collective learning and its efficacy in unleashing a "Great Transformation" towards

sustainability can be actively fostered, thus moving us into a hybrid paradigmatic terrain merging agency-based- and emergent notions of learning, i.e. some sort of "weighted emergentism". Section 1.3 of this chapter is aimed at filling-in this theoretical gap, while Chapter 2 addresses the problems derived therefrom. The issue of agency in collective learning towards a transformation constitutes the cornerstone of this dissertation, giving rise to our main research question, namely: *how can collective learning processes towards a social-ecological transformation of Western-style modernity be actively fostered?*

A second, related issue arising from the idea of a self-organizing, interactively generated symbolic order – as anticipated above – is the role of power relations and power imbalances in the interaction process. While the ubiquity of power relations in social interaction processes, regardless of the theoretical lens used to observe them, can hardly go unnoticed, I identify two main ways of approaching the issue in the theoretical currents reviewed here: For Eder (1999, 2007), the socio-cognitive scaffolding (the 'deep structures') upon which every form of social interaction builds is autopoietically constituted, i.e. it emerges from diffuse self-organization. As a consequence, in this theoretical scenario, power is exerted at the level of superficial structures (e.g. via uneven playing fields in negotiations), and only extends transitively into the deep structures, therefore falling largely beyond the scope of the study of CLPs. For authors in the Foucauldian and decolonial traditions, in turn, power comes very explicitly to the fore in day-to-day social relationships of knowledge. By implication, the power-dimension cannot be bracketed out when studying meaning-making processes. Boaventura de Sousa Santos, for example, considers power-knowledge regimes so central that he conceives of social justice primarily as an issue of "cognitive justice"[55] (Santos, 2008; Santos, Nunes, & Meneses, 2007).

The theoretical strands purporting the theses of 'emergence' and of 'power-knowledge'[56], respectively, stem from dissimilar traditions. Still, their mutual differences do not amount to incompatible

[55] Alongside Foucault, Santos understands knowledge as intertwined with power, but, alongside postcolonial thought, he adopts a more structuralist view of knowledge-power regimes: Western (or Eurocentric) modern imaginaries have marginalized or suppressed other cultural models, effectively relegating them to a 'space of non-existence', and therethrough manage to legitimize and thus maintain their stance of alleged ontological superiority, giving rise to the ideologies of development and progress. Social justice can thus not be achieved – we might add: neither can ecological unsustainability be unmade – without "cognitive justice" (Santos, 2008)

[56] According to Foucault, reality is defined as the result of the balance of power amongst diverse "regimes of truth", which are, in turn, sustained through *discursive formations*, i.e. discursive groupings that follow historically institutionalized sets of rules for discourse production (Keller, 2012). For example, a scientific discourse is manifest in texts, conferences, papers, talks, associations, and so on,

ontological or epistemological presuppositions, but rather to a matter of varying emphases, vantage points, and objects of study. Indeed, while power differentials leave their imprint in virtually any social fact, this is arguably less central an issue in European studies as it is in postcolonial societies. Moreover, unlike Eder's main empirical endeavors, this doctoral thesis does not engage in socio-historical analysis of cultural change from a macro-perspective, but rather in 'interactionist-dramaturgical' analysis (J. C. Alexander, 2004; J. C. Alexander, Giesen, & Mast, 2006) at the meso-level. In other words, instead of looking at larger cultural change *ex-post*, I intend to research concrete discursive change as *ex-ante* indicators of unfolding cultural change. While in the former case the leverage of concrete social actors might be negligible, in the latter an a priori exclusion of power considerations seems unwarranted. This is to say that even if these two theoretical strands have developed autonomously from each other, this research endeavor may profit substantially from their pragmatic integration. In this regard, while acknowledging that discursive agents are no "masters of the discursive universe" but rather discursively (co-)constituted as well, it is equally clear that they by no means act naively, but rather

> as lively, interested producers of statements, as articulators with more or less strong resource and creativity potentials. The symbolic orders that are produced and transformed in this process constitute the aggregated effects of their actions; unambiguous temporary forms of dominance or hegemony are probably rare, but they are nonstandard configurations that should not be excluded from an empirical point of view (Keller, Schünemann, & Simons, forthcoming, p. 17)

Since discourse, dramaturgy, and the agency-dimension therein are key in addressing our main research question, the following section seeks to build a theoretical bridge among these concepts, and integrate them with CLP theory, capitalizing on the discussions above. Analogously to what we did with CLP-

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which can all be studied as data. It emerged historically out of actions and interactions committed to "tell the empirical truth" about phenomena "in the world" – both in its form or formal appearance as well as in its contents: what could – and should – be told about these phenomena. Once institutionalized and given general legitimation, it pre-structures what could be said and done in this particular discourse arena. The Foucauldian concept of *power-knowledge regimes* usefully summarizes the idea that dominant institutions produce discourses that become commonly and uncritically accepted as 'truths' or 'facts'. This form of power requires no coercion, as it is exercised merely through established socio-cultural practices – we might say: it is imprinted in the 'deep structures' of the socio-cognitive world. As a result of this, Foucault's conception of power/knowledge radically differs from the study of power in traditional conceptions, such as Marxist or Liberal ones, in that power relations are not considered mainly as relations between someone who possesses power and someone over whom this power is exercised. Although the aforementioned is apparent in a superficial analysis of power relations, a deeper, more sophisticated analysis would necessarily have to include subtler forms of power exercised not through agency, but through structures, in a dispersed, ubiquitous, way; whereby power is not only oppressive, but also constitutive (of subjectivities, practices, 'realities'), as Butlers hetero-subjection theory, with which we engage in Chapter 2, clearly shows.

theory, the theoretical state of the art will be used as a point of departure, and will then be problematized in the face of the peculiarities emerging out of the current historical juncture as characterized by the all-disruptive presence of *geostorical* challenges and the derived transformation-imperative.

1.3. Discourse & Dramaturgy as heuristic framework for the study of collective learning processes towards a socio-ecological utopia

This section offers an attempt at articulation of collective learning and discourse theory, under the premise that discourse change can be validly used as a heuristic tool for the study of emerging CLPs. It starts by explaining what is understood under the label 'discourse' in this dissertation, and why it matters for the study of CLPs, in particular for CLPs relevant to a prospective social-ecological transformation (or 'transformative learning'). Following, two operational theoretical-methodological frameworks are introduced: First, the Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse (SKAD) (Keller, 2011) will serve for the interpretive content-analysis of the empirical case-studies in Part II. For the analysis of discourse performances or 'stagings', we resort to J.C. Alexander's (2004) "Cultural Pragmatics" and its 'dramaturgical model'.

1.3.1. Discourse research: middle-range theory operationalizing collective learning

According to Erik Olin Wright (2013), there are at least two interrelated arguments to account for discursively constructed alternative futures – which we can refer to as *transformation discourses* (TDs) or *utopias*[57] (see Introductory chapter) – working as a precondition for collective learning and social change. First, the question of establishing a plausible and desirable destination of change arguably takes precedence over the question of the way of getting there. Why waste energy developing TDs before having proofed their achievability? The straightforward answer is that this is the only possible course of action, insofar fundamental social change is so complex and contingent that the question about the its achievability does simply not have an *a priori* answer. In addition, one could argue that,

[57] Utopia is not synonymous with 'unreachable' in the context of this thesis, but rather with something that *appears* as unreachable. And by definition, according to our theoretical disquisitions above, anything which is not defined within the parameters of the prevailing symbolic order appears impossible. Hence, utopia is the necessary output of any collective learning process.

apart from providing direction, the development of credible and desirable alternative futures ("concrete" or "real utopias") feeds back positively into their achievability. Indeed, credible visions can reasonably be assumed to have a greater mobilizing power than non-credible ones. Furthermore, the wider the diffusion of such plausible alternatives, the greater the cultural resonance for such ideas will be, and thus the greater the likelihood of the emergence of corresponding actions. These postulates refer to the social definition of the boundaries of the possible, which, as we saw, lies at the very heart of collective learning. Departing from the above assumptions, this dissertation proposes the study of the discursive construction of TDs or social-ecological "real utopias" as an unfolding transformative collective learning process.

The notion of *discourse* is a structuring concept in the interpretative paradigm. As a first conceptual approximation, the notion of discourse can be loosely defined as "a common way of apprehending the world" (Dryzek, 1997, p. 9). A variety of scholars have aligned with and contributed to this theoretical strand. In the critical discourse-analytical tradition, the work of the Frankfurt school is prominent, as is that of Foucault, Laclau-Mouffe, and Fairclough. In the realm of sustainability discourses, Maarten Hajer and John Dryzek arguably stand out as the most influential scholars (Hannigan, 2006). These authors have all made singular contributions to the notion of discourse, placing diverse emphases on particular aspects of this complex phenomenon, yet their common-ground understanding is that discourses are meaning-making activities that have incidence onto the definition of (certain parts of) reality, and thus contribute significantly to shaping social structures and processes (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Hence "discourses do not map 'the world out there' but constitute reality in a specific way" (Keller, 2013, p. 71). Two key processes can be distinguished as constitutive parts of said meaning-making activities: processes of *semantic signification* (i.e. how meaning is formed), on the one hand, and processes of *communication* (i.e. how meaning is conveyed), on the other (Ramos Zincke, 2012). For shorthand, we refer to the first type of process in terms of *discourse as representation* (Chapter 3 and 5) and to the second in terms of *discourse as practice or performance (dramaturgy)* (Chapters 4 and 5).

Complex issues normally generate a large variety of interpretations and prescriptive proposals (Dryzek, 1997), and the issue of the global *geostorical* system-crisis and its possible solutions is no exception. Thus, this issue can be perceived as constituted by different discourses struggling to assign certain meanings to it. Such a complex configuration of competing discourses covering the same thematic

domain we will hereafter call *discursive field*[58] (Dryzek, 1997; Hopwood et al., 2005; W. Sachs, 1997; Vanhulst & Beling, 2014a).

Yet 'discourse' remains too broad a concept. Both in scholarly and social praxis, it has largely served as an umbrella term for conceptualizing debates or broader ideas and discussions at any societal level (Leipold, 2014). Hence, some conceptual clarification is required before an operationalization for empirical enquiry can be attempted.

In correspondence with the dual register of discourse-as-representation and discourse-as-practice introduced above, discourse analysis[59] can be conceived of in two broad ways: one which understands discourse as a semiotic system and thus focuses on language and rhetoric; and another one which understands discourse as social practice. Departing from the understanding that meaning is not an inherent attribute of linguistic propositions, but rather that such meaning becomes attached to their respective actualizations in the form of situated utterances, it becomes clear that variations in the use of language and semiotic systems by social agents can trigger changes in discourse with reality-construction, relational, and normative effects[60].

Another relevant fault-line between discourse-analytical approaches distinguishes between discourses embedded in the logic of political conflict versus discourses embedded in the broader flow of socio-cultural meaning-construction. While in the first category the instrumental use of *argumentation* in

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[58] The concept of *discursive field* is equivalent to what Norman Fairclough calls "order of discourse" (Fairclough, 1992), and to what Foucault termed "discursive formation", yet the term 'discursive field' appears more straightforward to me, and is thus preferred.

[59] Discourse is treated in this dissertation as an analytical concept, that is, as an entity that the researcher projects onto the reality in order to create a framework for study. This means that the question of delimitation is determined strategically in relation to the research (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002).

[60] This latter understanding of discourse overcomes a pre-Wittgensteinean conception of language as an axiomatic system of statements: Insofar discursive in nature, language is not a sable code, but rather an activity where signs play a vital role (i.e. a semiotic process, a variable relation between *signifier* and *signified*). This shifts the understanding of the semiotic system as *structure* towards its understanding as practical application: "discourse appears as speech, text, discussion, visual image, use of symbols, which have to be performed by actors following social instructions" (Keller, Schünemann, & Simons, forthcoming, p. 17). In other words, texts (and their constitutive elements, such as stories, frames, etc.) become an object, a 'circulating reference' (Latour), shedding light on consubstantial connections between the cognitive and other elements or fields making up social activity. An exemplary illustration for this is the opening quote of this dissertation by Milton Friedman, who surely had a completely different thing (most likely opposite!) in mind than what his words are intended to signify in the context of this research.

pursuit of short-term, concrete strategic goals comes to the fore (e.g. win a parliamentary majority), the second category comes closer to Eder's analytical lens emphasizing long-term and self-organization. Yet it is valid for both cases that social actors are continuously engaged in discursive struggles, in which each of them "try to secure support for their definition of reality" (Hajer, 1995, p. 58).

In order to ensure us picking the most suitable approach regarding the task at hand, the question is which logic better fits the situation under analysis. To be sure, the empirical debates under observation share many aspects of political conflict situations, hence the importance of argumentation. Yet on the other hand, their governing logic is not that of short-term politics, i.e. a logic of polarization dividing participants into supporters and challengers of a given person, policy proposal, etc. Furthermore, they largely take place outside and beyond the formal political system, mobilizing diverse sources of societal influence, in the terrain of what Ulrich Beck called *subpolitics*. Hence I argue that while the discursive dynamics of both the debates around GT and BV should be expected to be transversed by the logic of political conflict (especially the latter), they reach well beyond it, and should be rather conceived in terms of an interplay among "knowledge practices"[61] (Haraway, 1991; Latour, 2008). This implies *active agency and contention at the level of reality construction*, whereby the strategic motivations of agents are to be regarded as embedded into a broader, more complex, dialectical process of meaning-making. The symbolic orders that are (re)produced or transformed in this process can be regarded as the emergent effect of their aggregated actions.

The above considerations clearly point to a discourse-analytical approach away from the linguistic focus of structuralist conceptions of discourse (e.g. Laclau & Mouffe's discourse theory) and the polarizing rationale of, say, Hajer's argumentative approach to discourse, and closer to the Foucauldian line of discursive or knowledge-practices. By implication, the analytical lens should be enlarged to include the various material, practical, and ideational elements involved in the process of meaning-making. The central point is that a discourse is not mainly explained by what it 'says', but by how it actually 'works' in social practice (Joan Beasley-Murray, in Beasley-Murray, 2013), – i.e. what non-

[61] While epistemologically kindred to the notion of discursive or 'cognitive project' introduced in Chapter 1, the concept of 'knowledge practice' places greater emphasis on the dimension of social practice in knowledge production, reproduction, and transformation. Knowledge practices are distinguishable from other social practices in that they "involve self-reflection, which productively reshapes the context of practices into the motive and engine of actions that do not simply repeat their contexts" (Santos, Nunes, & Meneses, 2007, p. 17). They can take the form of narratives, ideologies, theories, etc., as well as their creation, modification, and diverse enactments.

linguistic effects communication processes generate, and, in turn, how the latter are affected by the former.

In this post-structuralist conception, discourses can thus be understood as attempts at 'freezing' meanings, or, more generally speaking, at fixating symbolic orders in time (Keller, 2012, p. 59), while discourse changes "contribute to the liquefaction and dissolution of the institutionalized interpretations and apparent unavailabilities" (Keller, 2012, p. 58). In other words, analyzing changes in these provisionally frozen symbolic orders through discourse research grants access to the observation of unfolding collective learning processes. At the same time, discourse analysis can be seen as inherently 'critical' in that it reveals how material discourses constitute power relations of various sorts. (Keller & Poferl, 2011)

Now, how does the notion of discourse change reflect the disruptive character attributed above to collective learning? Innovation studies' scholar Clayton Christensen (2013, cited in Altmann, 2015a, p. 163) draws a helpful distinction between 'sustaining' and 'disruptive' innovations which can be easily extended to discourse analysis. A 'sustaining' discursive change can be understood as any innovation in discourse (e.g. the introduction of a new concept) without a major epistemic break vis-à-vis the dominant discourse, while a disruptive discursive change poses novel contents, demands, or frames that deviate significantly from the latter. Hence, while 'sustaining' discourse innovations do not relate to collective learning, 'disruptive' ones do. By their very conceptualization, transformation discourses (TDs) match the latter type.

The next section addresses the question of how to operationalize discourse research in accordance with the post-structuralist conception of discourse outlined above. The Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse (SKAD) seems well suited to the task in terms of fitting the object of analysis. Indeed, SKAD is conceived as an analytical heuristics for the empirical study of discursive representations emerging from knowledge-practices[62] and the "politics of knowledge" (Keller et al., forthcoming). It therefore focuses on the use of signs (including language) as a social practice, and on the (re)production and transformation of symbolic orders.

[62] The term 'discursive practices' is preferred to 'knowledge practices' in the SKAD framework, as it highlights the typical-like character of statement-production. This presupposes not only active shaping by social actors, but also their interpretative competence.

1.3.2. Operationalizing the study of discursive representation: Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse (SKAD)

The Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse (SKAD)[63] offers an integrative and coherent methodological framework for discourse research alongside the epistemological and theoretical guidelines exposed above. As does CLP theory, it dwells on the Weberian hermeneutic and the German social-constructivist traditions (as represented by Berger & Luckmann), and on the (pragmatist) Symbolic Interactionist tradition (following George Herbert Mead), which account for the social constitution of significant symbols and competences of symbols' utilization. It also integrates insights from the social phenomenology of Alfred Schütz, which sheds light onto the meaning-making process through the use of signs and symbols. As in the Habermasian tradition underpinning CLP theory, language and communicative processes take center stage, but the role of nonverbal practices in the constitution of a symbolic order is also interrogated. The main theoretical source of SKAD, however, – and the main complementary feature it offers in operationalizing CLP theory – is Foucauldian discourse theory, with its emphasis on institutionalized (and therefore structural rather than agential) forms of power. What results of the above is a balanced combination of Durkheimian social-institutional facticity and a Weberian interest in meaning-making agency, alongside a Maedian perspective of interactionist socialization processes and use of significant symbols (Keller, 2012, p. 56).

Hence, in line with the research questions and the empirical research requirements, the SKAD framework allows for a focus on symbolic orderings and discursive agency, without losing sight of material settings and devices, as well as broader contextual factors. SKAD also proposes a clear analytical framework for the studying of the various cognitive devices shaping symbolic orderings such as frames, narratives and storylines, or phenomenal structures (see Chapter 3). While SKAD is especially tailored for the analysis of the 'content-part of discourses' (discourse as representation), it offers much less developed guidelines when it comes to collecting and analyzing data regarding the dimension of 'discourse as practice'. However, it does offers articulation potential with other methods

[63] SKAD was developed by Reiner Keller (Keller, 2006, 2008, 2012, 2013) more explicitly since the late 1990s. While it enjoys widespread recognition in the German academic scene, it remains largely unknown elsewhere (likely due mainly to linguistic barriers). Its utilization in this dissertation is also aimed at contributing to a wider dissemination of this analytical framework beyond the German-speaking world.

in the interpretative tradition in sociology, such as the dramaturgical framework of J.C. Alexander applied here.

SKAD structuring concepts

This section summarizes the main theoretical concepts underpinning SKAD, following the descriptions provided by Reiner Keller and some of his collaborators. (Keller, 2012, 2013; Keller et al., forthcoming)

SKAD builds upon the central Foucauldian insight that discourses can be systematically analyzed as more or less stable configurations of recurrent 'statements' *(énoncés)* that materialize in the form of a much larger number of 'utterances' *(énonciations)*, i.e. concrete meaning-instantiations which can adopt diverse formats, be these verbal or non-verbal, written or non-written. While the total amount of utterances produced in any discursive field may be approximately infinite, the total number recurrent statements is principally finite (Foucault 1981: 115ff, cited in Keller et al., forthcoming, p. 18). Discourses can thus be systematically studied by retrieving the limited set of statements that constitute its 'building blocks'.

Yet even if discourses, as any other structure, tend to inertially reproduce themselves, each individual discursive event or *utterance* introduces some level of variation into this reproduction process, so that the structure of any given discourse is never actualized in a completely identical way, thus enabling discursive variation. Yet "discourse transformations can rarely be related to such an individual event. Rather, they originate out of the sum of variations, in a kind of switch from the quantitative to the qualitative effect" (Keller et al., forthcoming, p. 18).

Hence discursive change implies more than mere actualization: indeed, it amounts to an altered meaning-structure, i.e. a change in structural patterns in communicative practice and related materialities. This requires a highly creative utilization of discursive materials at hand by social actors, which leads back to the classical question of agency vs. structure in social theory. Drawing on Giddens' duality of structure, SKAD resolves the agency-structure tension by resorting to the explanation of a creative use of discursive patterns by social actors as *instructions* (rather than *determinants*). That is, social actors apply cognitive rules and resources available within their discursive context as tools for producing/articulating interpretations in their everyday praxis; such rules, however, do not drive social actors in a deterministic sense, but rather provide them with codes needed to intervene in the social

world. It is only if discourse research accounts for this agency of actors that it becomes helpful to understand how the more or less creative implementation of discursive practices happens, and therefore to understand discursive change (Keller et al., forthcoming, p. 18).

Social actors relate to discourse in two possible ways: as statement producers (i.e. *discursive agents*) and as addressees of the practice of statement production (whom, following J. C. Alexander, we will call *audiences*). But actors also feature at the level of discourse as representation – which in the field of narrative analysis are often referred to as *actants* – depicting patterns of subjectivation or "subject-positions" which are generated in discourses. (Keller et al., forthcoming, p. 18)

Another key concept is that of *dispositif*, that is, a material 'infrastructure' bundling artifacts, practices, etc., that serves as the basis for discourse production. Of course, such infrastructures are also generated as an outcome of discursive practice, thus feeding back into the dialectic circle of discourse (re)production/transformation.

The above proposed concepts address the dimension of discourses as social practice. In addition, SKAD offers a framework of sensitizing concepts[64] designed to analyze discourses in their ideational dimension, distinguishing between interpretative schemes (also called 'frames'), classification or categorization schemes, phenomenal (or problem) structures *(Phänomenstrukturen)*, and narrative structures.

The most important and overarching element in terms of discourse-structuring function are interpretative schemes or *frames*. A frame is the implicit ideational background or against which a particular topic is discussed, providing orientation for interpretative activity. Hence, climate change, for example, can be framed as an issue of geopolitical north-south confrontation, but also as an issue of national security. These two frames diverge in terms of their focus, but nonetheless share a common assumption, namely: that climate change is a matter to be addressed at the level of nation-states; an assumption which is, in turn, disputed by other frames highlighting the cross-boundary and cross-sectoral transversality of the problem. Yet climate change may also be framed as a matter of private consumer behavior. These diverse frames lead to equally diverse understandings of the problem, therefore often also to divergent solution proposals.

Similarly to what we discussed about discourses in general, frame analysis can view frames as "deliberative, utilitarian, and goal directed" attempts at orienting sense-making activities by specific agents (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 624), or rather as the emergent outcome of complex interactive

[64] For detailed conceptualization, see Chapter 3, or Keller (2013)

meaning-making processes. While strategic framing is undoubtedly a widespread practice, as any marketing expert would know all too well, the understanding of frames in SKAD rather aligns with the second interpretation. Indeed, viewing frames only as a strategic tool tends to downplay the complexity of collective meaning-making and overstate the power of influence of individual agents on the process of establishing meaning.

Narrative structures can, in turn, be defined as combinations of statements that are organized along a storyline or a plot, i.e. a set of statements which effectively tell a story alongside a temporal axis. Furthermore, narratives constitute the basic modus of ordering human experiences of the world in a meaningful way[65] (Eder, 2006; Keller, 2008; Viehöver, 2006). Narratives are also the empirically most easily identifiable form that discourses take, and the easiest to link unambiguously to discursive agents. For this reason, narratives – or their shorthand form: storylines (Hajer, 2006) – constitute our central analytical concept in discourse research.

The 'theme' of a discourse is constituted through a network of referential links among diverse elements or dimensions of this theme, which are interlinked in a specific form or phenomenal constellation (Keller, 2012, p. 87). *Phenomenal structure,* a notion draws on Karl Mannheim's classical notion of *Aspektstruktur,* thus refers to the *Gestalt* of a phenomenon, that is, how it is constituted (in a given discourse at a particular moment in time) both in terms of its structuring dimensions and how these dimensions are fleshed-out with particular contents.

Together, the above elements make up an *interpretative repertoire* that can be used as a toolbox by social actors in their individual sense-making activities, and in their meaning-making (inter)actions. Keller (2013, p. 73) defines interpretive repertoire as "a typified ensemble of statements related to a discourse which is more or less comprehensively actualized in individual utterances". As a coherently interwoven set of elements, specific interpretive repertoires *allow* sense- and meaning-making activities by social actors; as a discursive construct, however, simultaneously they *suggest* certain pre-structured meanings: from a given discourse one can derive certain interpretations of the problem at hand and attached specific solutions, relevant actors positionings (villains, victims, heroes, etc.) and roles, and differentiated levels of responsibility or blame regarding the problems and solutions identified.

[65] According to this anthropological assumption of a *homo narrans*, the strategic self-serving *homo oeconomicus* would be – its all-pervasiveness in the currently prevailing symbolic order notwithstanding – but the product of a particular (provisionally crystalized) narrative about the human condition.

Schünemann (2014) introduced another analytical category with the purpose of adapting SKAD to the polarizing logic of political conflict: the *argument*. The argument, as conceived here[66], emanates from a particular discursive strand – for example the discourse about the ecology in a given society – and develops into strategic positionings to endorse particular policy proposals or political candidates. Complementing SKAD, which will inform particularly the analysis of discourse as representation, the following section introduces the dramaturgical model of J. C. Alexander (Cultural Pragmatics) as heuristics for the study of discourse as practice. A pragmatic combination of the two, together with collective learning as a macro-theoretical horizon, yields an integrated framework suited to the empirical study of the GT and BV case studies.

1.3.3. The 'walking-and-talking discourse': dramaturgical analysis

As anticipated above, while SKAD offers a detailed and solid framework for the analysis of discourse as representations (i.e. the 'content part' of discourses), it falls short of an equivalent level of ambition when it comes to systematizing the dimension of discourse as social practice. The same can be said of other critical discourse-analytical approaches. Even if they acknowledge the importance of the pragmatic dimension of discourse as a socio-cultural practice (e.g. Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis), a refined and systematic prescription as to analytical procedures and tools are only provided for the analysis of discursive representation. Indeed, there seems to be a systematic bias towards linguistic (and, most often, written) textual forms in discourse research. This should hardly come as a surprise, since sociological approaches to discourse carry the baggage of their origin in linguistic analysis. To be sure, the complementary dimension of discourse as practice has gained traction through Foucault's stitching together of knowledge and power structures in a single entity; yet Foucault himself did not develop a systematic heuristic framework for the analysis of discursive practices. In his expositions of SKAD, Keller acknowledges this and remits the reader to the methods and methodologies established in the broader context of the interpretative social sciences.

[66] Here a terminological digression is in order to distinguish said conceptualization of the term 'argument' vis-à-vis the meaning attributed to it in the Habermasian tradition. Indeed, rationalistic assumptions about the intrinsic quality of arguments ('the better argument would prevail') have no place in the above exposed conception of argumentation.

In this regard, recent scholarship has drawn attention to the role of the *dramaturgical* dynamics of social and political processes in discourse-production (J. C. Alexander, 2004, 2011; J. C. Alexander et al., 2006; Hajer, 2005). Altmann (2015a) rightly suggests that the process between the introduction of novel discursive elements and the emergence of a discursive innovation remains largely black-boxed in discourse theory. The concept of 'performance' comes in handy to fill in this explanatory vacuum, and dramaturgical analysis as the method to study situated discourse-generative performances.

Dramaturgical analysis thus emerges as an attempt at systematizing the study of the "walking-and-talking-discourse" (Beasley-Murray, 2013), or else "texts in action" (Wagner-Pacifici 2000, cited in J. C. Alexander, 2004) as a typical dynamic of social interaction drawing on the language, symbols, and logic of theatre. Its sociological roots, in line with the theoretical approaches reviewed so far, lie with symbolic interactionism, in particular Erving Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Goffman, 1990)[67], where key concepts and ideas from theatrical performance are first systematically adapted to the study of social interaction. The most relevant feature of a dramaturgical approach in terms of the research questions addressed here is the *situational contingence*[68] *of subjective ascriptions of meaning-offerings* in discursive practice[69], and – from a methodological vantage point – the systematization of such situation: in order to understand the *pragmatic* dimension of discursive practice, a careful analysis of the performance of such discourse is required (including various elements such as roles, audiences, on- and back-stage settings, etc.), thus Alexander (2004; 2006) referring to his approach as "Cultural Pragmatics".

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[67] Goffman acknowledged the influence of Kenneth Burke's analysis of policy processes in dramaturgical terms (Burke, 2009). It is also Burke rather than Goffman who informs, for example, M. Hajer's work on dramaturgical analysis.

[68] The foregrounding of situational contingence immediately remits to Adele Clark's (2005) theoretical and heuristic enterprise with *situational analysis,* conceived as a post-modernization of Strauss and Glasser's Grounded Theory. While this is an epistemologically compatible perspective (also drawing on Foucauldian discourse theory and symbolic interactionism), Alexander's dramaturgical approach offers more focused conceptual and theoretical elements for understanding discursive change, through notions such as performance, (re-)fusion, or cultural extension.

[69] Indeed, the discursive force of any knowledge claim is dependent upon the subjective ascription to the discourse that is *performed* within a particular socio-cultural setting.

Once social action is conceived of in dramaturgical terms, deliberate interventions can be easily conceptualized as *mise-en-scène* (Hajer, 2005). Dramaturgical analysis then enquires into the way its diverse elements (script, setting, staging, means of symbolic production, etc.) play out in the performance of the actors in front of their audiences[70], a performance which is in turn enabled and/or constrained by multiple external forces (J. C. Alexander, 2011; J. C. Alexander et al., 2006; Hajer, 2005). According to Hajer, dramaturgical approaches become indeed increasingly relevant at this particular historical conjuncture, insofar setting and staging have shifted from being regarded as contextual, assumed-to-be relatively stable variables bracketed as *caeteris paribus* in traditional (qualitative or quantitative) analytical models, to become key independent variables in processes developing in contexts of high turbulence (Dryzek, 2000; Hajer 2003, cited in Hajer, 2005). With the purpose of identifying discrete factors with greater explanatory weight, individual analysts have varyingly placed attention on particular elements of socio-political dramaturgies, alternatively emphasizing the staging process and the institutional setting (Hajer, 2005; Risse, 2005), the external constraints of the performance (J. C. Alexander, 2011), or else the combined effect of the various elements such as changing settings, framings, cultural background assumptions, the various *dramatis personae* in the play, and the actual staging of discourses (J. C. Alexander, 2004). By placing relatively greater emphasis on the complexity of the actual discourse-generative praxis; dramaturgical analysis would help us to "infer under what conditions a variety of people and voices emerge in the political discussions, how the variety of contributions can be related to one another in a meaningful way, and under what conditions such statements can be made with influence" on the actual political will formation (Hajer, 2005, pp. 630–631).

Yet if the dramaturgical approach is to be helpful in explaining discursive change towards transformative collective learning, it requires articulating the micro-level type of dynamics – which is the usual stuff empirically examined through a dramaturgical lens – with developments at the meso-

[70] The analytical separation of 'actors' and 'audiences' may appear to collide with the Foucauldian understanding of discourse as both constituted by and constitutive of subjects (i.e. of discursive agents), risking to "overemphasize the strategic and tactical leverage of certain actors in political conflicts, effectively shrinking discourse research from high theoretical ambitions to something close to an analysis of successful (or failed) rhetoric". (Keller et al., forthcoming). Yet the heuristic fixation of the roles of discoursing participants into actors and audiences does not amount to misrecognizing the discursively constituted character of both of them.

macro levels of society. Does the dramaturgical approach offer any help in advancing such theoretical articulation? J.C. Alexander (2013; 2004; 2006) has indeed attempted such an articulation effort, extending the dramaturgical approach beyond the well-established analysis of micro-level interactions to elaborate a full-fledged macro-sociological theory of social action as cultural performance[71], thus merging material and ideal categories driving social evolution into a single theoretical framework.

Dramaturgical fusion: the key role of agency in collective learning processes

Alexander's theory proves useful to explain how what we have called symbolic or cognitive projects (in dramaturgical jargon: the script) become successful at (provisionally) stabilizing meaning in collective interaction processes: the key explanatory concept is *"fusion"*. In line with Eder and the Foucauldian tradition, and, like them, rivaling with the rationalist tradition, Alexander (2004) contends that symbolic frames constitute the ultimate organizing principle of modern societies, as they did in traditional societies. From a functionalist vantage point, Alexander observes that reflexivity and negotiation in the modern world are no effective functional substitutes for the role of *rituals* affirming metaphysical and consensual beliefs in traditional cultures, "with the result that conflict, disappointment and feelings of bad faith are at least as common as integration, affirmation, and the energizing of the collective spirit" (Alexander 2004, p. 528). Instead, most vital social processes (including integrative processes) in complex societies are essentially symbolic (J. C. Alexander, 2004; Goffman, 1974), which means that the goal of modern social performances remains the same as the

[71] Note that the concept of 'performance' can be attributed at least three different meanings: In the sense put forward by Alexander (2004), performance denotes any attempt to display social meaning for others in a situation of communicative interaction, by resorting to a set of dramaturgical resources that cannot be captured by the 'content-part' of the message alone. If such performance is perceived as fake –that is, as *theatrical,* in the pejorative sense- it will fail to persuade audiences. Contrasting with this purely analytical account of performance, the second meaning has a strong critical component to it, such that 'performance' comes to refer to simulative (inter)action or "hollow entertaining façadism", which –while still would be successful in Alexander's terms-, is deployed to close the gap between declarative commitments and effective action (Blühdorn, 2007, p. 272). Third and lastly, 'performance' in a more radical constructivist sense can denote the 'creation' of reality through contextualized interaction, yielding some observable output such as understandings of the problem at hand, knowledge, and new power relationships (Austin, 1962; Callon, 2007; Hajer, 2005; MacKenzie, Muniesa, & Siu, 2007). Unless indicated otherwise, in the framework of this dissertation, the term 'performance' is utilized in the first of these senses.

ambition of rituals in traditional societies: The success or failure of a given performance – i.e. its capacity to psychologically engage audiences with the script and its characters, enabling subjective ascription to flows of cultural meaning generated 'from the stage' – is determined by the degree to which the diverse elements constitutive of a performance have been effectively 'fused' together in a seamless manner, exhibiting an apparent natural unity that evokes the cohesive effect of rituals in traditional societies. In complex, pluralist, and functionally differentiated societies characterized by fragmented and un-engaged audiences, however, the ritual-like effect of successful cultural performances tends to be short-lived and extremely contingent[72].

This 'fusion'[73] involves both ideational and material elements, thus allowing us to integrate together both dimensions of discourse research – representation and practice – into a single analytical framework which seeks to "model the relationship between collective representations, symbolic action, spatial and temporal materiality, political, economic, and hermeneutical power, contingent action, and audience response" (J. C. Alexander, 2005, p. 20). Based on Alexander's model, in our empirical inquiry we assess the following dimensions of discursive performance as an interpretive

[72] This line of argumentation emphasizing contingence and situational adequacy as key explanatory variables resonates with the approach of sociological pragmatism, as represented mainly by Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot (1991, 1999; Thévenot, Blokker, & Brighenti, 2011), even though this approach privileges the dimension of discourse as representation. Indeed, pragmatic sociology evaluates argumentative claims according to their consistence with the diverse material and non-material 'markers' defining the situation in relation to which the argument is played out. Unlike Alexander, however, the French authors come up with a *taxonomy of possibilities for a 'fused performance'*, which they call "orders of worth" *(grandeur)*. Each *ordre de grandeur* distinctively draws on one of the major political philosophies in Western political thought and praxis. If any particular script is to break through the indifference or resistance from its intended audiences, it need to adequately 'fit' one of these *ordres de grandeur* in consistence with the particular situation at hand (more about Pragmatic Sociology in the Excursus of Chapter 2). In contrast to the two French authors, Alexander and Hajer assess the success or failure of social performance not on the basis of rationalistic assumptions of argumentative fitting, but on the grounds of a much more contingent constellation of elements, whose combination would lead to an empirically observable success ('fusion'), i.e. to achieving the subjective ascription of the intended audiences to the particular meaning conveyed in the performance of the script, thus establishing a discourse with that specific audience.

[73] Alexander's concept of *fusion* exhibits strong semantic resemblances with Hartmut Rosa's (H. Rosa, 2016b) concept of *resonance*. While a promising exercise of conceptual exploration, their comparison falls beyond the scope of this dissertation.

device to understand factors of success or failure in the staging of GT and BV as situated transformation discourses:

a. *Match between (foreground) discourse and background cultural representations*: this criterion tests the fit of a cognitive or discursive project against the established cultural model (i.e. ontological, epistemological, anthropological presuppositions, socially legitimized moral values and cues for appropriate behavior, identity boundaries, etc.). This match is covered by the aforementioned concept of *cognitive plausibility* of a discourse (Eder, 2006), as well as its compatibility with prevailing normative frameworks.

b. *Match between discourse and contingent situation* (spatiotemporal embeddedness): assesses the resonance the discursive project finds in the spatiotemporally embedded staging (e.g. political climate, collective memory of significant events in the recent past, symbolic impact of contingent events, etc.)

c. *Enabling/ constraining role of social powers* (symbolic production, distribution, hermeneutic), be it the power of critique and censorship, or shaping-power of public debate by economic interests, etc.

d. *Credibility and legitimacy of discursive agents*: analyzes the trustworthiness (perceived authenticity) and perceived legitimacy of the spokesperson(s) or discourse-carriers, and the sources and degree of legitimacy, both of which enable the psychological identification of the audience with the discursive agent(s).

e. *Receptivity of discourse addressees*: considers the cohesion or fragmentation of the intended audience around the discursive script, and the reasons thereof.

This last dimension, as we will see, renders the inherent dilemma of trying to conceive of collective learning as a political project apparent. Indeed, the concept of 'fusion', so central to the dramaturgical explanation of performance-success, poses a significant challenge when considered from the theoretical perspective of collective learning: on the one hand, complexity, pluralism, and uncertainty were identified here as preconditions for the destabilization of prevailing symbolic orders and thus

also for social learning (Section 1.2.3, this chapter). Yet on the other hand, such conditions tend to produce the fragmentation of audiences alongside social and cultural fault lines (Alexander, 2004; Rosa 2010), thus creating a structural barrier to reciprocal symbolic identification and communication, rendering the conditions of possibility for communicative interaction more unlikely to materialize. For this reason, discourses appealing to particularistic interests and identities are always more likely to find resonance in (and support from) their intended audiences. Such discursive dynamics, however, are ill-equipped as pathways towards a whole-societal sustainability transformation.

This socio-cultural segmentation need not be, however, a death-sentence for a successful performance of a transformative script: whether or not some shared cultural framework 'really exists' is not simply a factual issue; it is also a matter of *interpretation*. This is where agency comes to the foreground in our integrated theoretical framework of collective learning, discourse, and dramaturgy.

Indeed, *agency* becomes the cornerstone of the theoretical puzzle of balancing discursive pluralization as precondition for collective learning, while at the same time bridging socially and culturally fragmented social groups to secure pragmatic discursive-dramaturgical articulation (i.e. fusion). This can be achieved by means of *meaning-brokerage* and *translation* (Santos, 2004), actively (re)framing collective representation schemes and assisting in sense-making, developing new visions, providing leadership, building trust, facilitating dialogue, empowering weaker parties, and mediating in conflicts (Davies & Kaufman, 2003; Lederach, 2003; Westley et al., 2011).

Furthermore, this meaning-brokerage function of agency applies to both stages of the double movement implicit in collective learning processes identified earlier in this chapter: first, the deconstructive moment ("unbuild unsustainability"), where status-quo-challenging discursive forces will need to be rallied and status-quo-supporting ones be disarmed; and, second, the constructive moment ("build sustainability"), where the chaotic cultural and political imagination unleashed by the pluralization of discourse will require articulation into new fertile socio-ecological *real utopias*. Both meaning-brokerage efforts – one of deconstructive or disruptive imagination; and one of constructive creativity – are interrelated, necessary, and complementary efforts towards collective learning for a social-ecological transformation.

With regard to this meaning-brokerage function, however, the question remains: how can a plethora of diverse yet fragmented actors in different societal levels and milieus be made to converge on plural

yet organic, long-term oriented, and effective discourse and transformative coalitions? This gives rise to our research question about the roles and practices of 'transformative agents', which constitutes our first theoretically informed object of observation in the empirical case-studies.

Yet this is only the first question raised regarding a 'transformative agency'. We have hitherto taken the spontaneous existence of such meaning-brokering 'transformative agents' for granted. Following, Chapter 2 argues, rather on the contrary, that the emergence of transformative agency is structurally impaired, and formulates theoretical hypotheses for the type of structural enablers that would, correspondingly, help lift those constraints. These hypotheses also serve, in turn, as guidelines for empirical observation in Part II of this dissertation.

1.4. Chapter summary

Let us wrap-up this theoretical enquiry by summarizing the complex set of ideas developed in this chapter: At the outset, we introduced a sociological theory of collective learning (CLP-theory) as a macro-theory dealing with changes in "deep (meaning-)structures" at socio-cognitive and cultural level. From an empirical perspective, the concept of collective learning opens new research avenues aiming to understand the processes of change (or lack thereof) of shared symbolic structures, allowing for the intermingling of cognitive and non-cognitive elements (affective, material, temporal dimensions, etc.) (Forchtner et. Al, 2018). The case was made for collective learning as a necessary (though not sufficient) condition for a social-ecological transformation (SET) at Polanyian scale of the (rapidly globalizing) cultural model of the West, which by worldwide scientific and political near-consensus is imperative if a planetary ecological collapse is to be avoided.

Collective learning results from a dialectical dynamic of *emergence* (self-organization) and deliberate meaning-making activities ('cognitive projects') by social agents, and can be operationalized in terms of discourse and discursive projects, which, for the case of discourses envisaging a social-ecological transition as a 'real utopia', we call transformation discourses (TDs). A theoretical dissection of collective learning allowed us to broadly define our conceptual *foci* of observation and analysis, by answering the questions of when and how learning comes about, who learns and what is learned:

- It was established that learning comes about when the prevailing shared symbolic order is destabilized in the course of collective interaction. In terms of discourse, this translates into *discursive pluralization as a precondition for learning.*

- The learning-subject was identified as more or less formal *networks* (possibly including individuals and organizations) which would eventually influence larger cultural change.
- The object of learning is *socio-cognitive meaning-structures*, which would eventually result in transformed cultural structures.

Section 2 of this chapter sought to build a theoretical articulation between the macro-theory of collective learning, on the one hand, and discourse as a middle-range theory that serves as heuristics for the empirical study of CLPs, on the other. Discourse was thus first ontologically and epistemologically delimited and its compatibility with CLP-theory tested. The post-structuralist understanding of discourse adopted here opens two dimensions for empirical observation: the ideational dimension (discourse as *representation*), which is operationalized through the Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse (SKAD), and the performative or dramaturgical dimension (discourse as *practice*), operationalized through J.C. Alexander's Cultural Pragmatics. In the performative dimension, the key question is raised of when contingent 'cultural performances' of discursive projects succeed in producing cultural-extension effects, that is, in provoking meaning-shifts in situated contexts. The concept of *fusion* condenses the various types of material-ideational articulations that need to succeed if the discursive project is to find resonance with its intended audiences.

This raises the first core question about agency in this dissertation: namely what the typical roles of agency are in building successful articulations between the discursive project and the various material-practical dimensions of the contingent situation or context of discussion, and through which practices this is typically achieved. While at first sight achieving this fusion may appear as nothing more and nothing less than the pure art of politics, agents fostering 'transformative learning' face an even bigger challenge: how to balance the creative tension between *de-fusing* and *fusing*, that is, between 'unbuilding unsustainability' (i.e. breaking a hitherto successful or fused performance of the unsustainable way of life and model of development of the West) and 'building sustainability' (laying bridges for a new fusion around future-capable models of social organization and ways of life).

CHAPTER 2

The predicament of transformative agency

Futurzwei is a communication agency for a social movement that doesn't yet know it is one
Herald Welzer

2.1. Introductory remarks

Chapter 1 raised the question about the micro-foundations of collective learning processes at the meso- and macro- societal level, that is, the issue of agency as mediating such learning processes. This question is especially relevant in the case of sustainability-related learning: Indeed, given the likelihood of fundamental structural changes in interdependent socio-ecological systems, it seems reasonable to expect that current structural constraints will be loosened or changed over the coming decades, making more room for human agency so shape new structures in accordance to socially prevailing ideals or utopias (Raskin, 2008).

As will be argued below, however, a 'transformative agency' cannot be taken for granted. This chapter therefore raises the fundamental question of the conditions of possibility for its emergence, inquiring into the social genesis and structural constraints for the emergence of agents capable of energizing the necessary transformations towards a society 'capable of future' *(zukunftsfähige Gesellschaft*). In the second half of the chapter, I lay out theoretical questions derived from the above inquiry, which are aimed at orienting empirical observations, and hypotheses for overcoming (or at least mitigating) said structural constraints. An excursus at the end of the chapter winds up Part II of the dissertation by addressing the problem of the epistemic foundations for a critical theory of society in the context of the geostorical challenges of the Anthropocene, discussing implicit assumptions and epistemological choices underpinning this dissertation.

2.2. The micro-foundations of learning: agency in theoretical approaches to social change

For all relevant purposes, and respectively docking with the two theoretical strands mentioned in Chapter 1, agency-based theories of social change can be divided in two broad groups: those explaining change as a bottom-up process ('from below', i.e. through emergence when the change-impulse has

reached a 'critical mass') and those which see change as the result of top-down (by diffusion through power leverages), i.e. elite-driven processes[74].

Whichever the case, as shown when discussing the question of the subject of learning in Chapter 1, even a superficial empirical observation makes it clear soon that the transformation discourses (TDs) at stake here (GT and BV) do not reproduce through diffuse social interaction, i.e. without identifiable agent. Instead, they can be seen as veritable cognitive or symbolic projects which are vocally advocated for and embodied by specific (groups of) actors. A widespread yet ambiguous umbrella concept for these transformative niche-actors is that of "change agents"[75]. I prefer the more tailored yet still general term *transformative agents* to refer to agents pushing TDs through deeds or words. The particular quality of such actors has been interrogated in the area of socio-ecological transformation research: Concepts such as *niche-agents* (established by the Dutch 'transition school'[76]); *"germ cells"*[77]; or else *meaning-making elites* (Stengel, 2011) – i.e. top-down or else 'inside-outward' agential dynamics (Adrian E. Beling & Vanhulst, 2016a)–, on the one hand, but also bottom-up, counter-systemic social movements (Escobar, 2012b, 2015), on the other, have been applied to describe the agents bringing about counter-systemic agency and collective learning processes aimed at "undoing unsustainability".

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[74] With time, these two poles have come closer to each other, both incorporating elements of the other. For example, Field, Burton & Higley (Field & Higley, 1980) restated the classical elitist paradigm by Paretto, Mosca, and Michels, acknowledging that elites' room for maneuver is always constrained by the general orientations prevailing in society. *Elites* are understood here as groups of persons who occupy strategic positions in public and private bureaucratic organizations (e.g. governments, parties, militaries, productive enterprises, trade unions, media, educational and religious organizations, organized protest groups, etc), through which they are able to affect political outcomes individually, regularly and significantly.

[75] Considering its origin in organizational change management and its discursive historical record, the concept of *change agent* has been criticized as having an inherent technologist and economistic bias; in other words, for its system-immanent character to the prevalent unsustainable socio-economic order. See Weber (2014).

[76] This scholarly stream, which actually consists of two related streams of 'transition studies' and 'transition management', emerged in the Netherlands in the 1990s from a blend of academic traditions in innovation, history and technology, and has since found increasing acceptance in the policy sphere, especially of North-European countries. Yet at the same time it has met heavy critique from the academic sphere. See, *inter alia*, the work of Frank Geels, Jan Rotmans, and Derk Loorbach. For an assertive critique of the transition management perspective, see Shove and Walker (2007)

[77] Germ-cell activities are those activities that embody a potential response to deep-seated societal contradictions, and combine critical social and/or historical-material processes with values, dispositions, cognition and individual and collective agency capabilities to lead expansion, change and transformation (Lotz-Sisitka et al., 2015, p. 77)

To what extent the TDs at stake here are elite-driven or bottom-up processes is essentially an empirical question to be empirically resolved (see Chapter 6).

Regardless of the above, however, any attempt at bridging the emergentist and the agency-based conceptions of collective learning (what we called 'weighted emergentism') confronts a fundamental question: *where do these transformative agents come from?* That is, how they are socially produced, and how do they manage to gain an 'outsider' perspective and effectively confront the prevailing symbolic order into which they were socialized themselves? This requires a theoretical explanation which has remained unaddressed in CLP theory: it is the question about the micro-foundation of such self-organizing patterns, the question about the agency kicking-off collective learning processes; in this case, CLPs driven by social-ecological utopias. My theoretical interest is a double one: on the one hand, answering the above question by explaining the emergence of actually observable transformative agency (descriptive dimension). On the other, it should provide normative orientation as how to foster such transformative agency deliberately seeking to advance a social-ecological transformation (SET). This will hopefully contribute to increase the relevance of a sociological theory of collective learning for the scholarly agenda of Transformation and Transformative research. (Schneidewind, 2013b, 2015; WBGU, 2011)

2.3. Sources and dilemmas of "transformative agency"

For all their differences, the 'emergentist' collective-learning theory does share one critical assumption with agency-based theories of social change, namely: that collectively shared experiences of misrecognition, disadvantage, or disfranchisement within the prevailing social and cultural order lay at the root of socio-political and cultural change. Those disenchanted with the status quo then raise various normative and identity claims which provide the disruptive spark igniting processes of collective learning, potentially leading to social change (Eder, 1985; Pelfini, 2005). In the case of classical Marxist theory, the driver of change (via class-struggle) is material disfranchisement. In the case of post-materialistic theories of social change, such as recognition theory – particularly that of Axel Honneth, which is arguably the most elaborated theoretical framework in this tradition –, it is rather struggles for social recognition waged by particular social groups out of collectively shared experiences of disregard *(Misachtung)*[78]. These struggles, in turn, alter the shared horizon of collective

[78] Recognition theory aims at subsuming the classical Marxist tradition, insofar material drivers are framed as a particular case of misrecognition, and thus class struggle as a particular case of recognition

meanings and of social expectations, giving rise to both moral sensibility (i.e. a shared phenomenological horizon) and a moral order (a shared normative horizon) (Honneth, 1992, 2007). Hence both recognition theory and collective learning theory depart from the premise that the grammar of social evolution is essentially symbolic[79] and that the reproduction and transformation of boundaries of the shared phenomenological horizon (e.g. moral sensitivity, collective identity, fundamental assumptions about the world, etc.) – ideally mirrored in their corresponding material structures (e.g. in Western societies, respectively: Human Rights, nation-states, liberal philosophy, etc.)– is the historical backstage-constant in those processes of change, beyond the power-projects and power-leverages of particular agents.

Since my theoretical interest is understanding how counter-systemic or transformative agency emerges from within the very same society it aims at changing, what matters here – the many differences between recognition and collective learning theories notwithstanding – are the problematic common assumptions of these two theories regarding the dimension of agency. Indeed: both theories rely on the notion of a (socially constructed) autonomous individual capable of identifying and effectively addressing the sources of oppression (which are always conceived of as being external to the subject). This key assumption, however, proves problematic when trying to explain agency in the context of a

struggle. Therefore, I will use recognition theory as analytical *proxy* to agency-based theories of change, in general.

[79] While Honneth's theory focuses on the *normative* rather than on the *narrative* or symbolic order, as Eder does, Honneth (2007) does (unlike rationalists) raise the question of where normative claims come from, and his answer is that there is a shared phenomenological horizon of social expectations, i.e. a shared universe of meaning, which gives rise to actual normative claims. Normative claims presuppose a sense that one is *entitled* to certain forms of recognition. In my understanding, this constitutes the epistemological and theoretical docking point between the two theories, even if they divert in their respective *foci* and in their preferred explanatory mechanisms (i.e. recognition struggles in Honneth versus communicatively-mediated social self-reflectivity in CLP theory). There are, however, substantial differences between the two: At the most abstract level, while CLP theory is explicitly aimed at providing a theoretical basis for the critique of society, Honneth's theory remains more ambiguous in its scope, in a blurry middle-ground between a critique of social injustice and a critique of social pathologies (Basaure, 2011; Adrian E. Beling, 2016). Another ground-level difference – and partly a consequence of this ambiguity – is that *learning* is largely conflated with *change* in Honneth's theory, while Eder subscribes a more systemic view regarding how changes in socio-cognitive and cultural patterns translate into changes in the material world. An exhaustive comparison between these theories, however, falls beyond the scope of this doctoral thesis, as it would not be informed by the research questions and objectives.

whole-societal transformation in response to *geostorical* challenges. The following paragraphs are devoted to exploring this problematic character.

A first arguable assumption on the side of Honneth pertains the balance between agency and structure: Honneth's over-determination of the individual subject as an agent of social change was already pointed out by Habermas. Indeed, for Habermas, the process is rather driven by the defensive mechanisms of the lifeworld *(Lebenswelt)* against the threat of colonization by the systemic logic of the bureaucratic and the economic spheres (Basaure, 2011). In other words, Habermas, once again, brings the *self-organizing* as opposed to the *intended* character of evolutionary processes to the foreground.

But in addition to this problem of over-determination of an assumed-to-be-autonomous subject, the emergence of a transformative agency is further compromised by the problem of the *heteronomous subject,* which results from the circular dialectics of the subjection process, as theorized by Judith Butler: Indeed, if, following Foucault, power is understood not only as constraining the subject, but as *formative* of the subject, as well, then externally exerted power becomes the very condition of the subject's social existence and provides both the trajectory of its desire and its capability of self-reflection (Butler, 1997). Hence the double meaning of the term 'subjection': Indeed, 'becoming *a* subject' would simultaneously imply 'becoming subject *to*'. A corollary of the above is that by attempting to fight the power which constrains but simultaneously constitutes them as subjects, social agents perform, in that very same act, an attack against their own social existence[80]. Acknowledging the thesis of hetero-subjection makes our guiding question even more puzzling: Where are thus change agents fostering a whole-societal transformation towards sustainability expected to come from, if not the society into which they were born and socialized, and which they are now required to try and change *beyond recognition*?

But even if we could successfully sort out the dilemma of the heteronomous subject, I argue that explaining agency confronting geostorical challenges requires factoring in another problem, which I have elsewhere called the *missing subject* (Adrian E. Beling, 2016). Indeed, the peculiar characteristics of the "perfect moral storm" (Gardiner, 2006) engendered by geostorical challenges give rise to a singular type of injustice, whose victims are inherently incapable of waging a struggle to reverse the condition

[80] Economic historian Avner Offer (cited in Jackson, 2009a) provides an empirically-supported portrait of the contemporary subject as a conflicted individual torn apart by the tension between growing socio-ecological awareness, on the one hand, and the cultural pressure towards positional competition to "avoid shame" – i.e. to attain social recognition of one's worth in society –, on the other. Stephan Lessenig (2014) and Herald Welzer (2011) have invoked kindred arguments in the context of the debate around social-ecological transformation in Germany.

of discrimination, exclusion, or subordination to which they are confined due to global environmental challenges. In the following, I will explore three different variants of the dilemma of the 'missing subject'.

The global scale and scope of geostorical challenges constitutes a first structural barrier to an effective defensive/vindicatory action on the side of stakeholders: because the main affected groups are the poor and disfranchised, they are incapable not only of opposing the great bureaucratic and economic forces of globally organized capitalism on equal footing, but also lack a suitable addressee for their claims: Indeed, the structures of the Westphalian world order are overwhelmed by the multiple transversality of global ecological challenges and systemic risks (Beck, 2008; Castells, 2008; Fraser, 2007, 2011). In addition, the poor and disfranchised are ill-equipped for even recognizing the highly complex mechanisms – which are only knowledgeable through the often cryptic expert-language of science – through which these changes dramatically affect (or will affect) their daily lives (E. A. Rosa, Renn, & McCright, 2014; H. Rosa, 2003). I call this first type of deficit: the *incapable agent*.

Secondly, I identify an *absent agent*, that is, culturally estranged or geographically de-localized 'others' affected by the consequences of, say, climate change, and thus with a stake in a social-ecological transformation (SET), but whose *Missachtungen* are culturally non-grievable (Butler, 2010) and politically unrepresented. In order to gain some level of cultural and political relevance, this structural disregard or *Missachtung* of victimized 'others' is dependent upon a double communicative mediation: first, as stated above, by science, without which the global ecological changes and their causal links with social arrangements remain completely veiled to human comprehension[81]; and, secondly, by the mass media, which create "simultaneity, shared involvement and shared suffering, and thereby creates the relevance for a global public" (Beck, 2010, p. 260). Hence, "the political explosiveness of global risks is largely a function of their (re-)presentation in the mass media". Yet the media, just the same as the conflicted and incapable individual subject, fails to address the issue properly: As complex-systems scholar James Dyke (2016) puts it in an article published by *The Guardian*: "We treat climate

[81] This characterization is not exclusive to geostorical challenges, but to most "systemic risks" (Beck, 1992), in general: Risk factors are interdependent, and the effects can lead a long chain interdependencies, without this being recognizable at first glance. Intuitively we associate causality with spatial or temporal proximity. This is no longer the case, however, in today's complex and interconnected risks – be it environmental ones or the great financial crises in recent decades. Because in such developments the link between cause and effect is not obvious, but is rather the outcome of many coupled intermediate steps, understanding and anticipating the risks in time becomes more difficult. (E. A. Rosa, Renn, & McCright, 2014)

change records as we treat new fashions, phones or films. But we seem unable to understand that we are driving such changes". Both the vertical broadcasting media and the horizontal 'social media' suffer from the same disease: the 'logic of news', with its short-term focus and its fragmentary approach, is ill-suited to foster deliberation about indirect, complex, long-term systemic risk in the public sphere (more about this in Chapter 6).

Furthermore, the public sphere itself would struggle to deal with this type of problems: downplaying Habermas' optimism about the public sphere as a societal (self-)control mechanism capable of balancing out economic (and bureaucratic) power, Hartmut Rosa (2003, 2010) envisages said balance as increasingly unfavorable to the public sphere: the more complex and plural a given society grows, democratic decision-making becomes slower and less effective, as compared to autonomous, single-bottom-line decision-making in the economic sphere[82], which currently dictates the general pace of social evolution. Markets would therefore be in a position of structural advantage to keep gaining leverage as a societal control mechanism vis-à-vis the public sphere. In addition to the above, even if it were successful, current research in environmental sociology has raised serious doubts about the efficacy of this double-communicative mediation, as illustrated by the aforementioned 'value-action gap' (see Introductory chapter).

The question posed by Ulrich Beck: "Why is there no storming of the Bastille because of the environmental destruction threatening mankind, why no Red October of ecology? (Beck, 2010, p. 254); or else Bruno Latour: "where are the passions commensurate with the stakes?" (Latour, 2010, p. 3), could find – in part, at least – their answer in this "virtually real" character of the subject and of the moral injury infringed by global environmental change. Summing up: in the case of global, systemic ecological risks, the *Missachtung* (of whatever type) is not perceived directly and without mediation, as agency-driven change theories assume to be the case; but, on the contrary, it is perceived in indirect, deferred, and mediated fashion, which can be expected to significantly weaken the capacity for transformative agency.

Third and lastly, the current and potential effects of global ecological changes are so multifaceted, diffuse, and their attribution so problematic, that it is extremely difficult – if not impossible – to define the damage and identify its casualties with minimal required precision. Therefore, the resulting injuries

[82] As will be shown in Chapter 3, Michel Bauwens addresses this problem and envisages a hopeful solution in the proliferation of decentralized, autarchic, and ad hoc distribution of decision-making power in social peer-to-peer functional relations (e.g. open-source projects)

are suffered by indeterminate subjects, a sort of "generalized other" (Mead), who, by virtue of its abstract and synthetic character, has no *agency* of its own. I will call this third type of deficit the *indeterminate agent*. Analogously, the inter-generational time-lag between the (invisible) generation of the causes and the (visible) manifestation of the consequences typical of *geostorical* challenges, such as anthropogenic climate change or threats to biosphere integrity, leads to the irony that the main victims of global ecological changes are generations just or yet to be born, who at present lack individual or collective entity to mobilize in defense of their legitimate interests, which are being violated by the actions of current generations. The *Missachtung* is thus *ipso facto* differed into the future at the time of being infringed, giving place to a delayed reaction which is inherently incapable of repairing the damage.

Indeed, the transformative social struggle which should theoretically ensue from the quasi-certain prospect of a true planetary catastrophe under the current development path is crippled by a triple deficit of what could be called *enactable agency*, insofar, as said above, the main stakeholders or casualties are either absent, indeterminate, or else incapable of grasping the problem and/or coordinating an effective countervailing action.

Now, the above problems – from the heteronomous *conflicted subject* to the *missing subject* resulting from the triple deficit of 'enactable agency' – should not prevent us from acknowledging *geostorical* challenges (understood as temporally and spatially diffuse byproducts of the aggregate actions of *homo economicus*) as effective triggers of collective learning processes towards sustainability: Indeed, there exists, *de facto,* a whole range of (attempts at) responding to this dilemma at various societal levels – ranging from practical initiatives; social, intellectual, and political movements; and the ongoing (re)production of lifeworlds –, which a full-fledged theory of societal learning/change (such as CLP theory) should be able to theoretically account for. We have hitherto focused on the shortcomings of agency-based theories to deliver such account. In the following, I will attempt at outlining necessary adaptations to these theoretical perspectives in order to redress their explicative potential and bring out their relevance for understanding and fostering transformative agency and transformative learning. Given that our research focus is on agency, I will theoretically elaborate on possible solutions to agency-related shortcomings under conditions of 'conflicted agency' and 'deficit of enactable agency'.

2.4. Redressing the dilemmas of transformative agency: Struggle for the recognition of an 'other'?

I would like to suggest that the paradoxes of *conflicted agency* (derived from heteronomous subjection) and of *deficit of enactable agency* ('missing subject') can, in principle, be largely circumvented through some form of deputy or *subrogatory agency*, through which individuals with effective agency-capacities "subrogate" the action of indeterminate, absent, or incapable agents in defense of their legitimate interests. This idea of subrogation of a diffuse interest by a representative or deputy agent is certainly not new, and even has some institutional and legal precedents: the *class-action* is a legal figure peculiar to the United States of America, which allows an individual or a small group to represent a particular 'class' of stakeholders which is much larger in number. Similarly, the worldwide extended figure of the *ombudsman* – which is currently competent even in the defense of human rights – incarnates a form of subrogatory agency. The extension of this figure for the defense of future generations is actively promoted by civil society organizations, with the *World Future Council* as its most vocal advocate; and has known even a pioneering institutional implementation in Hungary under the guise of the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Future Generations[83]. Also at European and international level the implementation of a similar representation device is intensively debated (Szabó, 2013). In the field of social movements, traditional movements such as workers, peasants, ethnic and sexual minorities, party-political movements, etc. continue to operate on the basis of a classical conception of agency. But the complexities of the contemporary globalized world have led to the emergence of other movements which 'represent' the interests of broader social groups, even the rights of third-parties: the alter-globalization movement, the movement for the remission of sovereign debt of poor countries, environmental movements, in defense of democracy, against mass animal husbandry, etc. Moreover, climate change, which can be seen as paradigmatic in terms of subrogatory agency, has given rise to a global, heterogeneous and increasingly visible movement which stems from the fusion of 'red' and 'green' activism, now joined under the single banner of "climate justice" (Bond & Dorsey, 2010).

[83] The so-called "green *ombudsman*" had not only advisory attributions, but could also, for example, initiate actions in the constitutional court and intervene in judicial proceedings in defense of the interests of future generations. After a short-lived autonomous existence (2008-2011), the figure of the Parlamentary Commissioner for the Future Generations has been subsumed under the Commissioner for Fundamental Rights (see: http://jno.hu/en/)

This notably happens even in the absence[84] of the theoretical preconditions envisaged by agency-based theories of change, i.e. material disfranchisement or other non-material forms of misrecognition. This demands the theoretical consideration of a functional substitute for these presupposed triggers of social struggle. To this purpose, insights from philosophical reflection about global change might provide some guidance.

In general terms, it seems safe to assume that the most proximate substitute for a personally-felt 'moral injury' would be an injury inflicted to one's community of reference, i.e. to those within one's collectively established identitary boundaries. Hence, it is often argued, global ecological change can only be effectively dealt with from a cosmopolitan perspective[85]. Alongside this line of argumentation, notions of a *species identity* (Chakrabarty, 2009) or else a global *community of fate* (Beck, 2010; Held & Hervey, 2009) have been proposed as sine-qua-non bases for ethically-oriented action on global change. However, these notions, which are based on the idea of a global and intergenerational solidarity, arguably remain too abstract to account for the emergence of social mobilization. Yet this does not imply that such ideas cannot be traced back to more 'grounded' accounts of generalized solidarity by diverse authors. One such precedents is Sahlins' concept of "generalized reciprocity" (1972, cited in Hénaff, 2010) – a form of diffuse solidarity with no expectation of a concrete *quid-pro-quo* or even a particularized counterpart –, a concept which could be made extensive to the moral imperative of leaving future generations an inhabitable natural environment, just as we have inherited it from past generations. The resemblance is even closer with the concept of "mutuality" by Marcel Hénaff (2010), which he defines as a solidarity-network without defined borders, involving a "more uniform and continuous circulation, and therefore a temporal continuity" (Hénaff, 2010, p. 18) and

[84] The uprising Degrowth movement in Western Europe (see Chapters 3 and 4) showcases this dramatically, where it is part of the relatively privileged well-educated, academic milieus who lead the protest against the ecologically plundering and socially polarizing effects of the global economy (Eversberg & Schmelzer, 2016)

[85] As a hermeneutic horizon, cosmopolitism has been understood as rivaling with the postcolonial "hermeneutics of suspicion", which sees humanity as the product of complex power relations. I would like to argue, however, that this opposition between a 'conciliatory humanism' and a postcolonial hermeneutics is rather apparent: indeed, a politics based on the notion of a species identity is an eminently normative ideal, while postcolonial theories base their criticism on the description of an existing social order. The latter is in no way negated by the former: indeed, climate change will certainly reinforce existing inequalities, but simultaneously dilute them, insofar no lifeboats for the rich and powerful can keep them safe from the unforeseen consequences of our actions as a species (Chakrabarty 2009, Beck 2010).

implies a "multiplied symmetry", a more homogeneous recognition among social actors. But probably the most suitable analogy can be established vis-à-vis Levinas' "ethics of otherness". Levinas emphasizes the responsibility beyond face-to-face relationships, i.e. a responsibility in the "third person" [86], that is, towards the neutral subject to which values, norms, and law refer, and who constitutes the foundation of ethics. The 'egocentric societal model' of the West is based on a self-referential understanding of responsibility: individual freedom is exercised with the primary purpose of the expansion and happiness of the self, while the freedom of the other is respected only insofar such respect makes a Hobbesian peace possible (thus enabling a continued exercise of one's own freedom), which leads to the creation of politics and the state. For Levinas, in turn, the existence of the state and of politics is not justified through the need to sustain a Hobbesian peace, but through the ethical imperative derived from the compassionate "heteronomous responsibility" for the welfare of the *other* (which for Levinas has an explicit connotation of social totality, a geographically and temporally omni-inclusive humanity). By lack of a concrete and tangible *alter* to interpellate *ego*, institutions guaranteeing the neutrality and universality of justice produce the necessary mediation "in the third person" between individual freedoms. In the same vein, Hans Jonas (1984) purports an "imperative of responsibility" for the ensuing global *risk society* – the imperative to act so that the effects of one's action are compatible with the permanence of human life on Earth –, which expands Kantian-style responsibility to a new scale in space and time. Alasdair MacIntyre (2001) goes even farther to fundamentally challenge the anthropological model of the "independent practical reasoner" – a healthy, strong, autonomous, rational individual –, which he considers to be a biased and unrealistic premise of Western modern philosophy. Instead, he advocates the recognition of mutual *inter*dependence (rather than *in*dependence) and – with Judith Butler (2010) – of our common *precariousness* or vulnerability as the normal condition of human existence. This exercise in recognition would be not only inescapable in accounting for the mutual imbrication of people in social life, but also for the mutual imbrication of social and ecological systems, which constitutes an essential (though modernly obscured) aspect of the human condition, i.e. of our identity as a species.

The exercise in abstraction implied in the elaboration of a species-identity in the sense of Chakrabarty runs the risk, however, of crippling the recognizability of the singularity of subjects by withdrawing all

[86] A concept which becomes prominent for Levinas in *Autrement qu´être ou au-de là de léssence* and onwards. (Burggraeve, 2009)

distinction markers. In order to resolve this tension, Chakrabarty maintains that global ecological challenges require thinking in a double register: indeed, global environmental change

> poses for us a question of a human collectivity, an *us*, pointing to a figure of the universal that escapes our capacity to experience the world. It is more like a universal that arises from a shared sense of a catastrophe. It calls for a global approach to politics without the myth of a global identity, for, unlike a Hegelian universal, it cannot subsume particularities. (Chakrabarty, 2009, p. 16)

Arturo Escobar (2011, 2012, 2015) coined a concept to designate this double register: *pluriverse*; that is, in the more familiar words of the Zapatista-slogan, "a world where many worlds fit"; a world that offers multiple opportunities for identification and for recognition, while simultaneously building an overarching social bond that rests on the mutual interdependence and common vulnerability. Furthermore, a pluriversal society would fit the balance between pluralization and articulation required for collective learning to unfold, as argued in Chapter 1.

Paradoxically, however, the very notion of precariousness or vulnerability that lies at the foundation of Chakrabarty's concept of "species identity", works, at the same time, as the structural constraint for the development of the latter: according to Butler (2010), given that our capacity to experience vulnerability depends itself on its own *recognizability*, the actual existence of such precariousness does not necessarily lead to a dynamics of mutuality, but can even lead, conversely, to an ontological segregation of lives which become expendable for the purpose of protecting those lives (or privileges) that do matter. This danger becomes all too evident in contemporary resource wars, dominant migration- and trade-policy worldwide, as well as, more recently, with the revival of extreme-right nationalism, notoriously in the global north.

This operation of segregation, however, does not take place within the normative framework of society – the realm of Honneth's struggle for recognition –, but rather in a realm of 'non-existence' that captures the residuum of such framework. This obscure realm of non-existence is where the indeterminate subject who falls victim to the consequences of global ecological changes is to be located; a subject whose loss is not experienced as such because its existence had never been recognized in the first place. Therefore, these are "non-grievable lives" (Butler, 2010). Nevertheless, Butler suggests that by reflecting upon the normative framework of society, it is possible to infer what that very framework excludes[87]; that is, we have the capacity of apprehending that which is non-

[87] This way of conceiving of the social world has its roots in Adorno's (Adorno, 1983) "non-identical thinking", which conceived of (an in principle totally determined) reality as containing elements which point beyond it, opening up the possibility for intellectually transcending the constraints of real society,

recognizable – not amenable to recognition–, and turn this apprehension into the basis for a critique of society: a society which disregards (*missachtet*) the (non-grievable) lives and the threatened welfare of future generations and of the poor and disfranchised of this world, who are and will remain the main victims of the global ecological crisis.

Boaventura de Sousa Santos goes even farther, and proposes to develop a systematic "sociology of absences" that builds on this space of non-existence (Santos, 2004). This is not just a matter of social justice, Santos argues, but further serves the purpose of recovering valuable wasted social experience for collective learning purposes. Therefore, not only that which has been excluded/negated/marginalized is relevant (i.e. what is *not*), but also that which lurks in the realm of non-existence because it is *not yet*, because it is on the verge of coming into existence, and currently only inferable through *clues* that point towards such emergence. The restorative enterprise of the "sociology of absences" is thus to be complemented, Santos argues, with that of an anticipatory "sociology of emergences"[88]. I would like to argue, in turn, that Butler's and Santos' reasoning comes very close to what CLP theory suggests is the *modus operandi* of collective learning processes: by apprehending and interactively reflecting upon that which is excluded from the prevailing symbolic order (i.e. the historically excluded and the emergent), the basis for social critique and the corresponding transformation of that symbolic order are laid. The 'space of non-existence' is absorbed by the 'space of existence' as a result of successful discursive projects shedding light on the blind spots of the old symbolic order, and, simultaneously, re-opening this symbolic order to alternative futures or utopias that had been confined to the space of non-existence as impossible or even unthinkable.

Now what are the implications of the above in terms of the preconditions for the emergence of transformative agency? It seems clear from the above considerations that the assumption of a collectively shared experience of personal disregard or disfranchisement can be (however imperfectly)

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and, therefore, for social learning. This thesis becomes even stronger with the pluralization of the world after the rise of the Global South (Rehbein, 2013) and the emergence of the pluralist theories of global modernity (see a.o. Arnason, 2003; Dirlik, 2007; Eisenstadt, 2000; García Canclini, 2004; Larraín, 2007; Therborn, 2003; Wagner, 2008, 2010): Indeed, if societies and their histories are fundamentally different from each other (unlike the assumed to be homogeneous empirical basis of classical social theory supposes), then the opportunities for 'reality-transcending'-social learning are boosted *ipso facto*,: indeed, available to drawing upon there is now the whole experience of other societies at their diverse historical stages.

[88] For further elaboration of Santos' ideas, see "Conceptual and epistemological considerations, at the end of the present chapter

subrogated by a collective process of reflection on and sensitization to the injustices and even on the pathologies of the prevailing socio-cultural order as a whole, by *actively searching for what this order excludes, and rendering it visible and relevant,* that is, by actively lending an ear to the excluded, the marginalized, the emerging, and giving them a voice, thus bringing them into the space of social existence, and multiplying opportunities for them gaining recognition, thus making their disfranchisement or *Missachtung* culturally grievable.

By implication, this amounts to actively engaging in deliberate field-leveling interventions to facilitate the emergence and development of transformative agency. But what should such interventions concretely be aimed at? Let us attempt an answer by formulating our research problem in the terms of the predicament of transformative agency, as outlined above:

Regarding the dilemma of the *conflicted agent*, the question arises: How can agents 'break free' from the constitutive bond that ties them, identity wise, to the world they are trying to change?

And regarding the predicament of the *missing agent* and the need for an effectively enactable or *subrogatory agency*:

- By which means can the disfranchised be empowered to have their voice represented in interactions shaping society?
- How can the mediation process substituting for a directly experienced *Missachtung* be rendered more effective? How can the 'invisible' be rendered 'visible'? That is, how can the space of social non-existence be absorbed into the space of existence?
- How can generalized reciprocity be fostered?

The above guiding questions will work as an observation device to be deployed in our empirical case-studies, fleshing out our research questions about the structural enablers for the emergence of the transformative agency, and the roles and practices through which agents foster collective learning towards sustainability.

2.5. Chapter summary

The agential dimension remains obscured in existing accounts of collective learning in social theory. Yet the inherently destabilizing environment of risk society and, in particular, *geostorical* challenges can

be reasonably expected to play on the side of agency in the classical question about the balance between agency and structure. Hence, this dissertation focuses on the agency-dimension of collective learning, contributing to the theoretical development of the latter.

The unprecedented prospect of a deliberately fostered whole-societal transformation towards sustainablity, however, puts both the emergentist CLP-theory and agency-based theories of social change to the test. Section 2 of this chapter explored the problematic aspects posed by 'wicked issues' such as climate change to the key assumption about the grammar of social change, namely: a collectively shared experience of *Missachtung* or disregard by disadvantaged groups to challenge prevalent social (symbolic) orders, thus propelling learning- and change-processes. Two main insights could be gained from this theoretical enquiry: if it is to account for a 'transformative agency', the classical understanding of agency in theories of social change needs to be revised, ad minimum, to address the parallel dilemmas of 1) the *conflicted agent,* resulting from the dynamics of hetero-subjection binding subjects' identities to the very world they aim at changing; and 2) the *missing agent,* which results from a triple deficit of enactable agency, as stakeholders are often structurally weak or incapable due to their condition of marginality, politically unrepresented and culturally misrecognized in the relevant social and political arrangements of a globally interdependent yet territorially structured world (we called this deficit 'absent agent'), or indeterminate/ unborn as a result of the diffuse and time-lagged impacts of global environmental change.

A revised theoretical concept of ('transformative') agency would thus need to answer the following questions: how can the hetero-determination lock-in be overcome or at least significantly mitigated? How can the disfranchised be empowered to make their voice heard? Since in the cases of the indeterminate and the absent subjects a subrogation of agency is inescapable: how can a more effective mediation be built? How can generalized reciprocity/ mutuality be fostered for individuals and groups with effectively enactable agency to take ownership of the missing victims' cause? These questions inferred from the structural deficits of conventional conceptions of agency to account for transformative forms of intervention will serve as points of reference or orientation for our empirical enquiry and later discussion. The empirical enquiry is expected to deliver insights into the characteristics of both actually existing transformative agency (descriptive dimension) and at idealized visions of it (normative dimension) drawn from the case studies.

Table 1: *Problematization of assumptions of agency-based social change theories in the Anthropocene*

Heteronomous Subject → *Conflicted Agent*	Common problem is the assumed self-determination of an (allegedly autonomous) subject. Butler opposes the thesis of the *heteronomous subject* ('the enemy is not outside, but rather inside')
Missing Subject → *Deficit of Enactable Agency*.	*Incapable subject*: the most affected social group are the poor and disfranchised
	Absent subject. Representation and recognition opportunities lie with individuals/groups which only experience an "indirect" moral injury or material disfranchisement. Presents three problems: - Weak, double mediation: 1) cryptic language of *science* and complex interdependence renders causal chains hard to visualize 2) volubility of *media* communication (both horizontal and vertical mass media): "logic of news"; - even if successful mediation likely ineffective (value-action gap) - inadequacy of the public sphere as political device: inefficiency of public deliberation as a mechanism to deal with complex problems in plural societies (H. Rosa)
	Indeterminate subject: the main stakeholder group are future generations. Problem of time- lag between the generation of causes and the full-fledged manifestation of consequences. In addition, the multi-faceted /diffuse character of the latter renders victims and concrete damages 'invisible', leading to a structural deficit of attribution and responsibility.
Possible solutions	Subrogatory agency + empowerment. Pathways: - Mitigating/ circumventing identitary bond to prevalent socio-cultural matrix - Empowerment of disfranchised - improved mediation of social *Missachtung* resulting from civilizational/geostorical risk - fostering generalized reciprocity

Excursus: Epistemological considerations for a critical theory of society in the Anthropocene

The whole theoretical construct proposed above rests on the assumption that social learning is possible, that is, that it is possible to assess the positive or negative quality of social evolutionary trajectories, even in the absence of transcendentalist and naturalist assumptions about reason and evolution. Yet how could anyone claim the capacity of observing society from the outside, so as to be in position to hold the very foundations of such society to critical scrutiny? Indeed, in the absence of transcendentalist presuppositions, this question is not satisfactorily resolved in the current state of the art in the philosophy of science, leading to a structural crisis of the epistemological enterprise as such[89] (Haye Molina, 2007). As we have seen with Butler, Honneth, Eder, and Sousa Santos, however,

[89] Indeed, epistemology – its ambition of being a meta-knowledge about knowledge notwithstanding – remains a form of knowledge (Greek: *logos*). And every knowledge, insofar communicatively

there exists a socially-immanent criterion for the critique of society: through a reflexive analysis of the prevailing normative order in any given society at any given point in time, it becomes possible to infer the space socially produced as non-existent (the space of *absences* and *emergences*), and utilize this exclusion as a basis for the critique of social injustice and of social pathologies.

I would like to further argue that, in the *geostorical* context of the Anthropocene, the above immanent foundation for social critique can be reinforced by a socially-exogenous one, namely: the integrity of bio-physical life-support systems and natural resource-base on which the reproduction of human life on Earth critically depends, as measured by Earth-systemic megatrends. The historically unprecedented character of this event provides a solid foundation for the critique of a society insofar it can be safely assumed that any society would want to develop in a manner which is functional to its own reproduction capability. While this is still a quasi-normative assertion, it is certainly not one that is likely to be controversial.

To be sure, however, our knowledge about Earth-systemic evolution remains communicatively mediated itself, and thus discursive in nature. This leads to reformulating the question which opened this excursus: Is it possible, in the context of *geostorical* challenges, to set a benchmark for *social critique which transcends discourse, even if it remains discursively mediated*?

A first approximation to an answer comes from within the constructivist paradigm itself: the discursive character of any form of knowledge does not amount to an absolute *relativism*, but rather to a form of *relationalism,* which gives place to the social generation of alternative assumptions about the nature of the world, about the nature of man, and about the nature of the relationship between man and the world (J. Adams, 1995; Thompson, 1984). Such assumptions, as empirical research in pragmatic sociology and in the political culture approach in political science have shown (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005; Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991; Thompson, 1984; respectively), are limited in number: "there are only a few rationalizable ways of life, and […] each of them is underpinned by a distinctive socio-logic and buttressed by a distinctive idea of nature" (Thompson, 1984, p. 326). In other words, there are only so many worldviews – the *ordres de grandeur* or *cités* in Boltanski & Thevenot's model – that are conceivable as part of an actually available historical repertoire of political philosophies, though nothing speaks against the possibility of it potentially (finitely) expanding in the future. The implication is that the question about which is the 'right perspective' on which to base political decision-making

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mediated, is discursive in nature. And since a discourse is always contestable by another discourse, this leads to relativism and therefore to the negation of any universalistic (hence uncontestable) conception of 'reality'. This premise is, of course, inherent to constructivist epistemologies.

(with the implied diagnoses and prescriptions) does not have a straightforward answer, yet in a context where the plurality of rationalities is limited, an answer should be possible, nonetheless. Indeed, according to Boltanski and Thévenot, invoking a particular rationality: political, techno-managerial, artistic, etc. – Enrique Leff (2004a) would add an 'environmental rationality' –, will be socially justifiable insofar it *fits the particular situation* to which it is being applied, as per the internal structural consistence of each system of political philosophy (Boltanski & Thévenot, 1991). Scientifically, the most fruitful quest would be a genealogical one, that is, inquiring into the structural drivers of the social generation of the alternative sets of assumptions (i.e. to ask where the assumptions came from) (Thompson, 1984), and then test-proof their consistence with regard to the situation where they are being deployed, be it in a more cognitive fashion, as Boltanski and Thévenot suggest, or through a dramaturgical lens which includes a wider range of dimensions in the analysis of situations, as we advanced in Chapter 1.

A second reaction to the above question resorts to *de-constructing the constructivist enterprise* in search for an answer: Bruno Latour convincingly argues that constructivist social science was born with the aim of emancipating the public from "prematurely naturalized objectified facts". Yet as the case of climate denialism clearly illustrates, the constructivist ethos is now being instrumentalized and its emancipatory character subverted through a (pseudo-)scientific controversy artificially sustained to the benefit of vested interests seeking to maintain the status quo. Hence, Latour argues,

> the danger would no longer be coming from an excessive confidence in ideological arguments posturing as matters of fact—as we have learned to combat so efficiently in the past—but from an excessive *distrust* of good matters of fact disguised as bad ideological biases! While we spent years trying to detect the real prejudices hidden behind the appearance of objective statements, do we now have to reveal the real objective and incontrovertible facts hidden behind the *illusion* of prejudices? (Latour, 2004, p. 227)

Along the lines of Latour's 'symmetric anthropology', for a satisfactory engagement with *geostorical* challenges, the critical enterprise would thus need to emancipate from its obsession with 'facts', which keeps it running up a down escalator in its mission of unveiling pathological social configurations. This does not amount, Latour argues, to sidelining empiricism, but rather to redefining it away from a misleading focus on "matters of fact" towards a focus on "matters of concern" (Latour, 2004). In the same vein, Blühdorn (2007, p. 270) argues that the question of 'empirical evidence' is misconceived, because the whole point is to reach beyond established societal self-descriptions, whilst anything that is considered acceptable as empirical evidence would invariably just reproduce these societal self-descriptions.

Hence, while Blühdorn (similarly to Latour) rejects a naïve demonstrative empiricism that would "tie social theory into the system and into the role of a service provider", he does advocate *empirical plausibility* as a validity criterion. Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2004, 2008) also turns his back to an outdated notion "empiricism" restricted to 'fact' and 'evidence', whose actual performative effect is keeping fundamental critique at bay. While the notion of *'clue'*, understood as something prefiguratively announcing what is yet to come into existence, is essential in diverse human practices of maximum rigor (such as medicine and criminal investigation), in the social sciences it has traditionally had no credibility at all (Santos, 2004, pp. 27–28). Santos' aforementioned *sociology of emergences* (see section 2.4 of this chapter) valorizes clues as indicative for the discussion about alternative futures. The potential evolution of observable clues into actual 'facts' is fraught with uncertainty, as a result of a double deficit: first, the conditions which would make the possible a fact are only partially known; and, second, such conditions themselves exist only partially. The clue can thus be regarded not as something inexistent, but as something whose existence has not yet fully manifested: as a 'not yet'. This 'not yet' is the key concept in sociology of emergences. Subjectively, the 'not yet' is anticipatory consciousness; objectively, it is actual capacity (potency, from the perspective of the agent), on the one hand, and concrete possibility (potential), on the other. The 'not yet'

> expresses what exists as mere tendency, a movement that is latent in the very process of manifesting itself. The Not Yet is the way in which the future is inscribed in the present. It is not an indeterminate or indefinite future, rather a concrete possibility and a capacity that neither exist in a vacuum, nor are completely predetermined. (Santos, 2004, p. 24)

As heterodox as they may be, these theoretical proposals by Santos, Blühdorn and Latour are, however, anything but new: Indeed, Santos' framework draws heavily on Ernst Bloch's "The principle of Hope" (Bloch, 1995; Muraca, 2014). Bloch's "not yet" has two dimensions: the "not yet conscious" (which belongs to the socio-cognitive realm) and the "not yet become" (material realm). For Bloch, social learning is driven by "concrete utopias", which – as opposed to abstract utopias, which merely amount to wishful thinking – draw on *existing* potentials and tendencies toward alternative futures; i.e. they are *anticipatory* of the real-possible, as opposed to the *compensatory* character of abstract utopia[90]. Concrete utopias are therefore – as argued above alongside Olin Wright (see Chapter 1, section 1.3.1) – both prefiguring and performative. Yet Bloch makes clear that it takes more than naïve hope for

[90] It is worth noticing that even the latter are appreciated positively by Bloch as a product –however fruitless- of the utopian impulse. Karl Manheim, in turn, criticized compensatory fantasies as ideological.

such anticipation to be fulfilled: what is required is what Bloch termed "militant optimism", that is, the enactment of effective agency led by a transformative vision, what we have called *transformative agency*.

At this point, it should be noted that the argument goes beyond the due consideration of epistemological assumptions and pertains the core business of the present research enterprise: Indeed, while collective learning theory has usually looked back into the past as its object of inquiry, what matters with regard to a social-ecological 'Great Transformation' is to understand and foster *ongoing* collective learning processes. To be sure, the past remains an indispensable source of knowledge and experience to illuminate our understanding of these processes, but can hardly account for the specifics of currently occurring learning processes. And the only way to study the latter, I would like to argue, is by resorting to the epistemological and methodological compromises above exposed, centered around the notion of actually existent anticipatory 'clues'. This dissertation follows a middle-ground-solution, focusing on discursive representations and their respective generative practices, i.e. actually existing 'evidence' of ongoing discourse pluralization, whose importance, however, resides in the fact that they are understood as *clues pointing towards emerging collective learning* processes with potential for a social-ecological transformation.

Wrapping up the above considerations: For all the consensus there is on the need for radical social change towards an inclusive and sustainable model of development, there is a paradoxical resistance to letting go of traditional 'certainties' (also in the epistemological terrain), even if this resistance goes against the core business of the social sciences: Indeed, "[t]he exploration of real utopias is an integral part of a broad agenda of an emancipatory social science" (Wright, 2013, p. 3).

Taking into account the available alternatives – a sustained status quo and the decades-long-dominant yet hitherto failed incremental-reformist strategy, versus a properly justified epistemological risk-taking –, and following into the footsteps of the abovementioned scholars, this research is to be decidedly inscribed into the latter.

This choice further mirrors the principle of post-normal science that – while striving for the best possible standard in both – *the relevance of the question should take precedence over the accuracy of the answer* (Gallopin, Funtowicz, O'Connor, & Ravetz, 2001; Santos, 2004), which means, in other words: relevant clues are preferable to superfluous facts. This view is equally embraced by emerging scholarly enterprises of *transformation science* and *transformative science* (Schneidewind, 2013a, 2013b, 2015; WBGU, 2011) (see Chapter 3).

PART II

Great Transformation and *Buen vivir*
as real-world collective learning experiments towards sustainability

CHAPTER 3

The "Great Transformation" as a field of discursive representation

"Vision is the most vital step in the policy process. If we don't know where we want to go, it makes little difference that we make great progress. Yet vision is not only missing almost entirely from policy discussions; it is missing from our whole culture."
Donella H. Meadows 1996

3.1. Introductory remarks.

Chapter 2 defined discourse as a 'cognitive project', i.e. as an attempt to transform the socio-cognitive 'deep structures' (symbolic order) in a certain direction. The domain of discussion we have termed the "Great Transformation debate" in Germany (GT debate for short) is the ideational *locus* where different partial discourses coalesce into an overarching discussion about whole-societal transformation. Precisely because of this complex, *meta*-like character–, the GT remains a diffuse and elusive field of discourse whose borders are inherently blurred. Therefore, a delimitation effort is required to mark the object of study off for observation and analytical purposes, as well as strengthen the validity of the analysis.

The ideational reconstruction of the discursive field followed a three-stage process of:

a. Initial outline of the discursive domain through early gained literature and field exploration for "empirical literacy" (Miles & Huberman, 1994) (including participant observation in conferences, workshops, etc., as well as exploratory expert interviews).
b. Literature recompilation based on a combination of exploratory expert interviews, secondary literature (see below), and a snowballing process. This yielded a data corpus of 87 texts, consisting mainly of 'grey literature'[91] and dissemination literature, as well as application-oriented scientific reports, which will hereafter be referred to as *main data corpus* (cf. Annex 1). This provided the database for the exploratory analysis of the field.

[91] Conceptual digression: Grey literature is neither offered through commercial bookstores nor through academic journals, but is rather available directly from the publisher. E.g. publications by NGOs.

c. A sample of 14 representative texts (hereafter Sample 1, see Excursus in this chapter) drawn from the main data corpus, which provided the database for fine-tuned analysis.

This chapter pursues a systematic reconstruction of the content of such discussion from an interpretative-analytical perspective, i.e. the GT *discourse as representation*. Chapter 4 then seeks to inquire into the *discourse as practice*, that is, into agent constellations, relations and processes, as well as into their situatedness and materiality. In so doing, it will bind together the findings of chapters 3 and 4.

Regarding the secondary literature available, apart from a handful of overview studies of the field of sustainable development discourses in Germany (Adler & Schachtschneider, 2010; Jacob, Bär, & Graaf, 2015b; Mikfeld, 2012; Schriefl, 2008), to my knowledge there are have been few scholarly attempts so far to analyze the German GT debate as a situated discursive sub-field of the former with peculiar features and implications. Among these existing attempts are a series of texts by Ulrich Brand (Brand, 2012b, 2014c, 2014b, 2016a, 2016c, 2016b), the exploratory study conducted by Gerrit von Jorck (2013a unpublished), and a couple of studies commissioned by the German Federal Environmental Office (UBA) and conducted by a research team at the TU Berlin (Jacob, Bär, & Graaf, 2015a; Jacob et al., 2015b). In addition, Matthias Schmelzer's (2015) structuring study of the growth-critical discourse in Germany proved a useful analytical source for this chapter. All of the above seek to inquire into the diverse discursive representations of the GT, in order to bring out the cleavages and clarify the content and implications of the diverse conceptual drivers and normative visions and strategies featuring in the debate. The present chapter builds on these precedents, while completing, strengthening and updating these analysis and derived insights through a more comprehensive and systematic discourse analysis. In this sense, the intended contribution of this analysis to the state of the art in the knowledge about the GT discourse(s) constitutes a research goal in and of itself (cf.Introductory chapter).

The chapter begins presenting the methodological proceedings for data collection and analysis. An initial exploratory analysis in Section 3.2 serves the purpose of identifying the key referential themes or issues (which I call the 'axial themes') in the GT debate. These axial themes appear in the debate combined in particular ways, which will be distilled from the texts in Sample 1. We call these representative combinations emerging from individual texts of the sample "GT-strategies". These GT-strategies provide for a first attempt at structuration of the GT-debate as a discursive field, as well as the basis for the study of narrative structures in the next step of analysis.

Section 3.3 undertakes a fine-tuned analysis of the discursive field of the GT, following the

methodological orientations of the Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse (SKAD) (Keller, 2011) introduced in Chapter 1. The SKAD framework involves inquiring into the content-structure or *Gestalt* of discourses; into the variegated identifiable narratives in the debate; as well as into the interpretative socio-cognitive templates or *frames* that can be therefrom derived. While the axial themes represent the building-blocks of the GT debate, GT-*narratives* (i.e. ideal-typical meaningful concatenations of axial themes) make up the main unit of analysis in our analysis of discourse. *Frames*, in turn, are the most condensed units of meaning transported via narratives, and provide an overarching (usually implicit) frame of reference for the discourse. A more detailed conceptualization of these analytical terms will be provided as appropriate.

These sub-steps of fine-tuned analysis will then flow in into an integrated analysis of the GT discourse in Section 3.4. The chapter ends drawing insights about common, divisive, and potentially bridging elements in terms of the discourse-content for the analysis of the discourse-practice (the 'dramaturgical analysis') in Chapter 4. As overlapping interpretative repertoire among discursive contestants in the GT debate, common elements set the boundaries of the GT debate vis-à-vis the broader sustainable development debate. Divisive elements, in turn, can be seen as a measure of pluralization in the debate. However, the focus of our interest is *bridging* elements, as, in terms of our research questions, they represent ideational-structural *enablers* of transformative agency at ideational level; that is, windows of opportunity for the transformation of meaning-structures, what we defined as collective learning.

3.2. Exploratory Analysis: delimiting the GT as a field of discursive representation

For the purpose of establishing an initial classification of the various contributions to the GT debate, I have used two guiding questions[92]: a) what are the axial themes around which the GT debate revolves? and b) In what combinations do these axial themes appear in the debate?. These questions were answered basing on a systematic analysis of the texts included in the main data corpus.

3.2.1. Axial themes of the GT debate:

[92] This exploratory design builds on the study by Gerrit von Jorck (2013a)

'Axial themes' is the term chosen in the framework of this analysis to represent the *topoi* or topical *foci* of the GT debate; that is, the main referential topics inductively obtained from the data through an iterative process of keywording, subsumption, and condensation (see methodological excursus at the end of this section for details). These *topoi* represent technical, cultural, and/or political leverage points that, from the perspective of the utterer, can or should be harnessed to unlock, trigger, foster, advance, or accelerate a 'Great Transformation'. In other words, they are proposed as 'building blocks' which can be purposively and varyingly combined into a 'transformation-roadmap'.

The final result of the iteration-process featured the following eight axial themes, in decreasing order of prominence within the GT-debate (as measured by the number of appearances in the data corpus):

- *Cultural change:* pertains the variable importance attributed to fundamental changes in cultural matrixes (moral values, aspirations, identity boundaries, sources of social recognition, beliefs or basic assumptions about the world) as drivers towards a transformation, and, more importantly, if these are to be regarded as an independent or as a dependent variable (e.g. of political impulses). The debate around consumerism is awarded special importance in the GT debate, and was therefore coded with an axial theme of its own. Distinguishable from cultural factors are particularly behaviorist strategies that seek to provoke change by means of exogenous stimuli.

- *Commons:* This axial theme pits approaches emphasizing the social and ecological advantages of a cultural re-habilitation of use-value, re-communalization, and common property or use of material and immaterial goods (i.e. knowledge) versus approaches emphasizing the 'tragedy of the commons' (G. Hardin), i.e. the risk of overutilization of commonly owned resources. The socio-cultural effects of a solidarity-based versus a profit-based economy are also part of this strand of debate.

- *GDP growth:* While the growth-debate is older than the GT debate, but has come to be framed as part of the latter. It covers discussions about the feasibility, desirability, and compatibility of a growth-oriented political economy vis-à-vis a GT. Central here is the issue of the technical and political possibility of *decoupling* economic growth from ecological degradation, as well as the observed persistent decoupling of economic growth from individual and collective

wellbeing in affluent societies. Because of the heavy technical-economic, political, cultural, and geopolitical implications, this is by far the most controversial and most politicized strand of discussion within the GT debate.

- *Re-localization/ regionalization:* served to code discussions regarding the globalizing dynamics of late modern capitalism as a key driver of the global ecological crisis and possible ways to address it through a (partial) territorial re-embeddedness of economic relations.

- *Restructuration of work:* most generally, this axial theme covers discussions about the re-embeddedness of a 'productivity'-centered economy into the dynamics of social 're-productivity'. Addressed here are, in particular, the interrelated discussions on the 'end of work', cultural re-conceptualization of work, redistribution of gainful employment and reduction in working hours, etc. Being a transversal issue largely determinant of social allocation of time, economic resources, social recognition, socio-economic and gender-based power relations, etc., the restructuration of work is certain to be a central feature of a GT.

- *Redistribution:* beyond considerations of social justice, redistribution (or else an altered primary distribution) is debated as a mechanism to roll-back positional consumption, as well as a compensatory or legitimizing mechanism to increase social acceptation of transformative measures. This argumentative strand stands in tension with post-materialist and growth-critical arguments, insofar a post-growth society implies a zero-sum game in distributive terms. In addition, the axial theme redistribution covers non-material aspects as well (redistribution of time, social recognition, cultural worth, etc.)

- *Democratization:* while the central strand of discussion pertains alternatives to empower democratic participation of people in political debate and decision-making, including the representation of future generations, this axial theme also covers discussions about the democratization of knowledge, including the democratization of science, as well as

- *Sufficiency:* introducing a conceptual differentiation (which is framed either in oppositional or in complementary terms) vis-à-vis efficiency- and consistency-strategies, sufficiency pertains the significance of a reduction in consumption – particularly in the areas of housing,

construction, mobility, and food, as well as intermediate goods (e.g. packaging), which account for the bulk of consumption-induced ecological and resource-impact. Cultural and political alternatives are assessed in one of the hottest topical *foci* in the GT debate.

As should be apparent from the above, each of these axial themes gives rise to a sub-discourse within the GT debate, each with a specific phenomenal structure which will be dissected in-depth in Section 3.3.1. But, as stands out from the outset, the centrality awarded, directly or indirectly, to cultural issues in the GT debate supports our assumption about the primacy of collective learning in unlocking entrenched unsustainability in the prevalent world- and social-order (cf. Introduction).

Also noteworthy is the fact that – despite playing a prominent role in the GT debate – the axial themes dealing with fiscal-policy measures fostering an energy and technological revolution or market-mechanisms were not selected as topics for detailed analysis. The reasons for this purposeful exclusion were two: First, their largely consensual (i.e. non-controversial) character; and, second, their system-immanent character; that is, they do not add any value in terms of discursive diversity to the GT debate, which was established as one of our criteria of observation (Chapter 1). The exclusion of the mentioned axial themes from further analysis does not amount to the exclusion of discourses building on such axial themes from our defined discursive field. Indeed, while such axial themes lack interest as units of analysis, mainstream voices remain important not only empirically within the GT debate, but also to our analysis, insofar a contrasting reference for counter-hegemonic TDs.

After distilling the axial themes of the GT debate, the exploratory analysis broadly modelled their various typical combinations (cf. Section 3.3.2), as they appear in exemplary transformative proposals or GT-strategies purposively sampled from the main data corpus.

Excursus: Detailed methodological procedure

How were the axial themes worked out from the literature sample?

The first step was keywording the main data corpus of 87 texts on social-ecological transformation. Following, a subset of the most recurrent ones across the text-corpus – which can be safely assumed

to represent the main reference-topics of the GT debate – was aggregated into a more synthetic code-list through an iterative process of equivalence-drawing, subsumption and condensation, allowing for greater conceptual parsimony and comprehensibility.

The process of subsumption and condensation was based on two criteria: a) Keyword frequency in the corpus, and b) relevance within the GT debate, as per secondary literature and exploratory interviews.

Keywords which featured in at least 30%[93] of the texts in the corpus were considered relevant for the discourse as a whole, while others were understood to be part of a smaller sub-discourse without major relevance to the broader debate. By way of illustration, the sub-discourses around re-localization and subsistence / peasant agriculture overlap to a large extent, whereby 'local sourcing' stands out as the central theme; hence, they were merged together into a single axial theme named "local & regional". Also, the sub-discourses around a re-politization of governance and the democratization of the economy were subsumed under the axial theme "democratization", even if they address the issue of enlarged participation in a fairly different manner. Furthermore, the sub-discourse on the strengthening of convivial or community-values, structural de-acceleration of the peace of life, and the very trendy topic of "the good life" were all subsumed under the more general theme of "cultural change".

The end product of this process yielded the following eight axial themes: *Cultural change* (64 repetitions); *Commons* (61); *GDP growth* (52); *re-localization/ regionalization* (48); *restructuration of work* (44); *redistribution* (44); *democratization* (32); and *sufficiency* (29). In turn, each of these axial themes gives rise to a sub-discourse in the GT debate, with a specific phenomenal structure (cf. section 3.3.1).

The axial themes are clearly not on equal standing in terms of their level of abstraction, their span (e.g. 'restructuration of work' is clearly narrower in span than 'cultural change'), or their political implications. Furthermore, some of them could be framed as constitutive part of another (e.g. sufficiency-orientation as part of the more encompassing 'cultural change'). Yet in this final list, the selection of axial themes has been condensed into the most abstract possible form without sacrificing

[93] The cutting-point was established at 30% based on an abrupt discontinuity in the ranking of keyword-frequencies, from 29 utterances in position 10 (keyword: sufficiency, featuring in ca. 33% of the corpus), to 12 utterances in the next slot (keyword: alternative currencies, featuring in ca. 13% only).

the specificity of the discursive content of each theme. Resorting again to the above example, condensing *sufficiency* into the more general category of *cultural change* would have meant disregarding the particularities surfacing in the discussion around *that particular referential topic* of cultural change. In turn, cultural change served to capture other aspects of importance within the debate which are less developed in their particularities.

The above axial themes were then applied as codes to a second corpus of 14 texts (Sample 1), which was chosen from within the broader corpus through theoretical sampling, and provides the basis for fine-tuned analysis (Section 3.3 of this chapter). As mentioned before, the texts in Sample 1 were selected to fairly represent the discursive diversity in the GT debate, i.e. containing the complete collection of relevant elements configuring the diverse discourses in the discursive field. The selection was done according to four criteria:

First, the texts should present a full-fledged GT-strategy, i.e. a blueprint for a whole-societal transformation, rather than, say, at discrete economic sectors, as would be the case, for example, in the much-touted German Energy Transition (*Energiewende*).

Second, the relevance of the particular texts within the debate (as a proxy for their structuring character), as assessed through the analysis of the pragmatic constitution of the GT-field of debate[94].

Third, it should combine a wide range of the axial themes identified, rather than merely a smaller sub-set thereof.

The fourth and last criterion refers to the constitution of the sample as a whole, and is aimed at guaranteeing that it is representative not only of the full-width of the discursive field (criterion of maximal contrasting), but of the subtler differences between proximate discursive takes, as well (criterion of minimal contrasting). The texts selected for Sample 1 were the following:

1. The UNEP-strategy paper "Towards a Green Economy" (UNEP, 2012) as representative of the mainstream SD discourse in the context of the GT debate.
2. The OECD-paper "Towards Green Growth" (OECD, 2011). As the official position paper

[94] In terms of the chronological order of methodological proceedings, this analysis (presented in Chapter 4) was actually performed *prior* to the analysis of discourse as representation presented in the present chapter, thus yielding insights for the latter.

of the OECD member countries vis-à-vis the 'multiple crisis' it plays a significant role in the German transformation debate.

3. Ralf Fücks' "*Intelligent Wachsen*" ('Grow smartly') (Fücks, 2013), which represents the most explicit and deliberate engagement of eco-modernism with the sufficiency- and growth-critical discourses in Germany.
4. The report "World in transition. A social contract for a Great Transformation" by the German Adisory Council on Global Change (WBGU, 2011), originally aimed at representing Germany's official position in Rio+20. It found broad reception in Germany, and served as a key catalyzer of the GT debate in the German-speaking world up until the present day (cf. Chapter. 4).
5. The ISM "Social-ecological societal restructuration" (Institut Solidarische Moderne, 2011), as joint position-paper of well-known representatives of traditionally considered to be left-of-center political parties in Germany – Greens, *Linke*, and SPD; together with some influential NGOs.
6. "Farewell to growth" (Latouche, 2009) by Serge Latouche, considered to be the father of the European Degrowth discourse *(Décroissance)*.
7. Alberto Acosta's "*Buen Vivir. Vom Recht auf ein Gutes Leben"* ("about the right to a good life" 2015a) brings in the Southern perspective of *Buen Vivir*, which has had noteworthy reception in the German GT debate.
8. The book *"Postwachstum. Krise, ökologische Grenzen und soziale Rechte"* ("Post-growth, Crisis, ecological limits and social rights") (Schmelzer & Passadakis, 2011) stands for the view of the anti-globalization network *Attac*, which played a pivotal role in bringing the growth-debate to Germany.[95]
9. The book *"Befreiung vom Überfluss"* ("liberation from the superfluous") by Niko Paech (2012) presents a classical strand of bottom-up, small-scale transitions at the communal level, yet framed in an unusual macro-perspective.
10. Uwe Schneidewind & Angelika Zahrnt's book "The politics of Sufficiency. Making it easier to live the good life" (2014) represents a 'radical reformist' perspective, and makes a pragmatic (and programmatic) case for sufficiency-oriented politics trumping the exclusive focus of the

[95] For example, Attac organized the first Degrowth conference in Germany in 2011. Schmelzer was also part of the organization committee of the 4th international Degrowth conference in Leipzig and is a fellow of the DFG-financed Degrowth Research Group at Jena University.

mainstream on a techno-efficiency revolution as the high road towards a social-ecological transformation.

11. Tim Jackson's "Prosperity without growth" (2009a), a report produced for the Sustainable Development Commission of the British government (2000-2011) complements Schneidewind & Zahrnt's meso-focus with a macro-perspective, and counts as the most representative text of the growth-critical discourse with a wider, international audience.
12. Meinhard Miegel's "Exit – *Wohlstand ohne Wachstum* ("Welfare without growth") (2010) represents a neoliberal/conservative growth-critique, which is a singular feature of the GT-debate in Germany (Schmelzer, 2015).
13. The feminist strand of the GT debate, with its focus on social *reproduction* (as opposed to economic *production*), ir represented here by Adelheid Biesecker, Christa Wichterich, and Uta von Winterfeld (2012).
14. Michael Bauwen's essay "Blueprint for a P2P society" (Bauwens, 2012b) was selected, for reasons of comprehensiveness and conciseness, to represent the discursive strand setting on the technologically-activated potential of the so-called 'digital commons' for peer-to-peer networks of prosumers. Internationally, this discursive strand is represented by public figures such as Jeremy Rifkin (2014) and Paul Mason (2015).

While not comparable with the other volumes listed above in terms of their broad reception, the last two texts were included in the sample with the purpose of offering a counterpoint vis-à-vis the former and expose the width of the discursive field (criterion of maximal contrasting).

3.3. Fine-tuned analysis: reconstructing the interpretative repertoires in the GT debate

Building on the exploratory analysis above, a second, fine-tuned analytical step will now be taken in order to pour the themes and GT-strategies identified into full-fledged discursive structures. The fine-tuned analysis follows the methodological guidelines of the *Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse* (SKAD) (cf. Chapter 1)

3.3.1. Phenomenal structures of the axial themes in the GT debate

The purpose of this section is to identify which particular categories or dimensions of the topic under consideration are being foregrounded (or even considered at all) in the discussion, and how this categorial scaffolding is fleshed-out; that is, how each of the dimensions of the phenomenon are problematized. This is what, following Keller (2011), I refer to as the analysis of the *phenomenal structure* of the debate. However, unlike Keller, who exemplarily analyzed the much narrower and focused discourse on garbage in a French-German comparative perspective, and came up with a synthetic overview of the phenomenal structure of the whole garbage-debate, in our case-study a straightforward unified analysis of the discursive field of the GT was not possible due to the sheer complexity of the field. Hence it was necessary to break down the analysis by single axial themes. In the final step of this analysis, however, a transversal appreciation of the phenomenal structure of the GT debate as a whole is attempted.

The phenomenal structures of each axial theme were built by scrutinizing in detail how the latter are dealt with across the texts[96] in Sample 1. For this purpose, the texts were thoroughly coded with the help of *Atlas ti* software for qualitative data analysis. *Atlas ti* then easily delivers a list of all coded texts excerpts or segments for each axial theme across the corpus, which is, in turn, second-level-coded with the categories inductively retrieved from a careful analysis of those excerpts. The first step allows to retrieve the *relevant categories* (say, for example, causal attribution, identity-markers, proposed course of action, etc.) for each axial theme, while the second allows to respectively flesh-out their *specific contents*. While the latter are expected to differ between competing discourses, the former may or may not differ. The final output of this phase of analysis is summarized below.

Cultural change:

Cultural change is mainly problematized in regard to the relationship between cultural and material transformation of Western-style society and economy. Positions are polarized between those who frame culture as the *object* of transformation and those who see this as a dangerous interference with individual freedoms. The former ones emphasize the social embeddedness of individual behavior and the socio-natural embeddedness of the economy, and therefore uphold political (i.e. collective) action as indispensable doorway towards a social-ecological transformation. For the latter, the transformation

[96] Arguments raised by the texts in Sample 1 are complemented, when required, with supportive, opposing, or complementing arguments drawn from secondary literature.

should target exclusively production patterns and leave the rest to the individual choice of allegedly autonomous and rational subjects. The first strand of thought thus targets political values as an object of transformation, and thus emphasizes the importance of creating suitable framework-conditions for cultural change. The latter, in turn, rests on the assumption of an ongoing change of moral values and social and environmental consciousness, and therefore relies more on creating economic incentives and argumentative persuasion for socio-environmentally responsible behavior[97].

The rationale of the cultural change discourse goes as follows: The socio-cognitive and cultural infrastructures of Western-style societies are geared towards growth. Individual biographies are focused on constant improvement and development. Success is measured by the level of material welfare attained, whereby consumption is the *locus* where the former becomes visible (Welzer, 2011). A social-ecological transformation should therefore target not only technological and economic infrastructures, but also "mental" (i.e. socio-cognitive) ones. Core cultural pillars of contemporary Western(ized) societies should be revised, both political values (prosperity, freedom, individualism) and moral or esthetic ones (happiness, good life, success – also sufficiency, which has been framed negatively as curtailment and sacrifice instead of an expression of freedom). Even modernity should be redefined away from a narrow linear evolutionary understanding towards a pluralist one (Acosta, 2015a). A philosophy of sufficiency and a non-materialistic vision of the good life would dissolve consumerism. Regulatory agents should create an infrastructure for cultural change via a "jaw-strategy": on the one hand, it should correct (or dismantle) the structure of perverse incentives for unsustainable and unproductive status competition (e.g. advertising, credit policy, etc.), as well as create new structures facilitating conviviality, participation, and social recognition. On the other hand, it should provide contrasting points of orientation to that of currently dominant culture via educational, time- and sufficiency-policies, as well as deliberately making room and facilitating cultural pluralism. In summary: The concept of cultural change covers the struggle between material-structuralist and behaviorist approaches which seek to trigger changes by means of individualized moral appeals or economic incentives.

[97] For a sound critique of this policy approach, see for example Shove (2010a) (cf. Introduction) or Kopatz (2016)

Commons:

This axial theme covers the discussion around the *commons*, i.e. collective resources that are defined by their non-excludability[98]. This variably refers to the utilization or the property of common resources – be they factors of production or consumption goods. Another relevant distinction in the debate is that between material (e.g. land) and immaterial commons (knowledge). The central cleavage builds around positions which emphasize the danger of free-riding and over-utilization (*tragedy of the commons*[99]*)* in the absence of unambiguous private property rights (Hardin, 1968), on the one hand, and positions which advocate the communal utilization of collective resources denouncing dispossession (land-grabbing, IPR regimes) and externalization dynamics as a result of privatization and commodification. The resulting prescriptions are thus diametrically opposed to each other: the first approach prescribe exhaustive privatization through legal property rights to unambiguously determine responsibilities, while the second approach sees the root of social and ecological problems precisely in this all-encompassing privatization and commodification, and would thus rather recommend collective autonomy, cooperation and responsibility vis-à-vis common resources[100]. The de-commodification implied in the communalization of goods and services should serve also to guarantee universal access to life-critical provisions, thereby enhancing the actual freedom of the many, in that it facilitates subsistence, on the one hand, but also more relational lifestyles. The

[98] The concept of commons differs from that of public goods mainly in that the latter have a discursive linkage to state-provision and/or management, while the former is normally connected with communal forms of social organization.

[99] This argument remains surprisingly popular despite ubiquitous evidence of the globally accelerating destruction of public natural resources such as mineral reservoirs or soil as a result of increasing commodification or privatization, which would rather suggest a 'tragedy of externalization' (Lessenich, 2016). Worse even: not only is externalization affecting the remaining stocks of communalized ecosystems and resource-reservoirs, but the increasingly financialized logic of capital is externalizing the unbound of all its former constraints towards the physical world, regardless of property considerations, reflecting the fact that the fate of capital-owners is no longer tied to the long-term preservation of this physical resource-base, be the latter privately owned or not.

[100] For example, while private market economies have an inbuilt drive towards generating economies of scale (i.e. minimizing marginal cost through increasing production with a given endowment of factors of production), commoning enables lateral instead of vertical scales (so-called 'economies of scope') – i.e. maximizing productive synergies through sharing factors of production. Following this line of argumentation, the latter clearly have lower material throughput and socialized benefits.

commons approach is furthermore to be distinguished from market-based approaches to common utilization, such as the so-called 'sharing economy' (e.g. AirBNB, Uber, etc.)[101], although both are often conflated in the debate.

Three agential instances are problematized with regard to the commons (Bauwens, 2012b): Apart from the commoners themselves, which rely on a given infrastructure for cooperation, the state (or other intermediate institutions) have a decisive role in sustaining that infrastructure. Furthermore, by lack of a global sovereign power, the conservation of certain global commons (such as transnational ecosystems) relies upon the tutelage of the international community. Thirdly, a role is also ascribed to market relations in a re-commonalized world, insofar this would generate the economic resources needed to maintain the infrastructure. Yet economic agents would be bound to the commoners, who create the real use value; rather than the other way around.

GDP growth:

Beyond the by now commonplace (rhetorical) critique of GDP as a flawed indicator for measuring welfare (Jackson, 2009a, p. 34; UNEP, 2012, p. 21), this axial theme differentiates transformation strategies alongside the question about the significance of GDP-growth for a social-ecological transformation. It is by far the most controversial as well as the most complex among the axial themes of the GT debate, reason for which some extra-space will be given here to its analysis[102]. The critique revolves around two main axes: an *ecological* axis and a *cultural* axis, with plenty of factual contradictions and disputed normative signifiers between critics and advocates of the default growth-centered political economy, some of which will be scrutinized in the following paragraphs. Critical positions can be disaggregated in two groups, at least: *a-growth* (a political critique, i.e. the critique of the socio-economic dependency from and the political growth-fixation) and *degrowth* (a technical critique of the

[101] See for example WBGU (2011, p. 146). For an overview and assessment of the transformative potential of the sharing economy, see Juliet Schor's (2014) essay for the Great Transition Initiative.

[102] The growth-debate cannot be summarized here without some loss of substance. However, good overview studies of the growth-critical discourse are available: For an overview of the international growth-debate, see, among others, Martínez-Alier (2014), Martínez-Alier et al. (2010), and Asara et al. (2015). For the German debate, see Woynowski et al. (2012) and especially Schmelzer (2015).

ecological and socio-economic dynamics of growth itself) [103], although degrowth is often used as an umbrella-term for all growth-critical positions[104]. Regarding the ecological axis, the central cleavage between growth-advocates and critics lies in their divergent prospective solutions to the "growth dilemma" (Jackson, 2009a, pp. 7; 11): for growth-critics, the structural dependence of the capitalist economies on growth faces governance-agents with a dilemma between short-term social and economic stability and long-term ecological (eventually also social and even economic) sustainability[105], the only solution to which is re-structuring the fundamentals of the economy. 'Pro-growthers', in turn, see economic growth not only as compatible with, but often even as a precondition for, a social-ecological transformation (Fücks, 2013, p. 162): indeed, only additional growth would deliver the level of welfare needed to address the multiple social and ecological crises (Fücks, 2013, p. 74; Initiative Neue Soziale Marktwirtschaft, 2012). To escape the "growth dilemma", however, this additional growth need to be sustainable ("green", "smart", "better" or "qualitative" growth). This could be attained through *decoupling* economic value creation from increasing material throughput, which will hereinafter be referred to as the *decoupling hypothesis*. Paradoxically, while the lack of consensus about the compatibility between growth and sustainability is seen here as a hindrance to a successful sustainability transition (Fücks, 2013, p. 72), growth-critics, in turn, blame the "dogmatic status of growth" (Jackson, 2009a, p. 10; Miegel, 2010, p. 173), that makes the growth dilemma go unrecognized in mainstream policy and public debate (Jackson, 2009a, p. 102). Hence, for growth-critics, recognizing this dilemma would be the point of departure towards a social-ecological transformation. While techno-efficiency has shown relative success in achieving "relative decoupling" (i.e. the reduction of material throughput per unit of GDP), it cannot deliver "absolute decoupling" between economic expansion and environmental degradation – except for a veritable miracle which

[103] There is yet another strand advocating a *steady-state economy* (for an overview, see Daly, 2007), i.e. neither increasing nor decreasing the volume of economic output with respect to a stabilization level. Yet since they do not feature prominently in the German GT debate (thus neither do they in the selected literature), they will hereinafter not be considered separately for analytical purposes.

[104] Furthermore, over the time-frame of this study, *Degrowth* has progressively become an umbrella term articulating a heterogeneous array of intentional communities and social movements variably combining an ecological and a cultural critique of the globally dominant Western way of life (for an overview, see Konzeptwerk Neue Ökonomie e.V. & DFG-Kolleg Postwachstumsgesellschaften, 2017).

[105] For a comprehensive description of the "growth dilemma", see Jackson (2009a)

is currently nowhere in sight –, as per-unit efficiency gains are steadily over-compensated by the overall scale of economic production, a phenomenon known as rebound-effect or 'Jevon's paradox'[106]. In addition, the "angelized GDP" thesis (i.e. the idea that economic growth can be pursued dispensing with a corresponding growth in material throughput) has a flawed focus on production, rather than on consumption patterns, which continue to rely heavily on high street sales of material goods that need to be produced, transported, and purchased (Jackson, 2009a, p. 76; Paech, 2012, p. 9). As a result of these combined effects, sustainability would be incompatible with exponential growth. While *de*growth-advocates of a pose a deliberately planned contraction in the size of economic output to avoid an unwanted recession (whereby authors varyingly disagree as to the geographical universalizability of prescriptions and the timing of the transition[107]), and emphasize the destructive

[106] Originally theorized by British economist William S. Jevons in the 19th Century, *rebound-effects* are increasingly developing into a research-area in and of themselves (see, a.o. Santarius, 2012, 2014, 2015; Sorrell, 2007), and into an object of heated controversy. While it is clear that hitherto historical and empirical evidence sustain the rebound-effect rather than the decoupling-theory, the literature reviewed here shows contradictory statements as to the present developments in technological and resource-efficiency gains: Ralf Fücks, for instance, is convinced that *absolute* decoupling (i.e. the reduction in absolute levels of resource-throughput with continued GDP growth rates) is not only a realistic hope, but that it can already be observed in some sectors (Fücks, 2013, pp. 39, 169) and countries (Fücks, 2013, p. 168). Tim Jackson, in turn, argues that absolute decoupling is worldwide not even in sight (Jackson, 2009a, pp. 8, foreword). In some sectors, relative resource throughput is actually accelerating, rather than declining (Jackson, 2009a, p. 8). Furthermore, part of the hitherto actually observed *relative* decoupling (i.e. the reduction of material throughput per unit of production, as in UNEP, 2012, p. 15) vanishes when conjunctural economic variations and transboundary flows are factored into the equation (Jackson, 2009a, p. 76). In addition, not all sectors of the economy can be "greened": according to Exner et al (2008), between a third to a half of global GDP is attributable to sectors that cannot be "greened", and will thus need being phased out. Even if assuming it were achievable, however, absolute decoupling would not lead to sustainability, as it would unleash a process of "creative destruction", whereby old productive infrastructure would have to be completely replaced, leaving idle waste-capital behind (Paech, 2012). How to make sense of such outright contradictions? In general, as per the literature reviewed, 'pro-growthers' tend to deploy partial and merely illustrative data in an impressionistic manner to sustain their more general arguments, while growth-critiques are founded on lasting mega-trends. Furthermore, pro-growthers consider improvements vis-à-vis the status quo as a measure of success, while growth-critics tend to use scientifically-informed stabilization targets as a benchmark.

[107] In this regard, while Jackson favors degrowth in the north with simultaneous continued growth in the south, Latouche poses that maintaining growth in poorer countries ignores the path-dependency of growth (if you build a growth society, it is very difficult to un-build at a later stage); and the plain insight that a convivial society can be fostered regardless of growth in general (maybe growing selectively the relevant sectors of industry and commerce)

ecological and socio-economic effects of an oversized, de-territorialized, and growth-addicted global economy, *a*-growthers focus on the perverse effects of the primacy of economic growth as superordinate policy-objective, while leaving the question of the contraction-imperative without an aprioristic answer – although overall GDP-contraction should be the likely result of a mix of selective de-growth (fossil-industries) and selective growth (green and service industries, and solidary-based economies) (Jackson, 2009a, p. 77). Growth critics further point out that jobless and low-growth is the consensual horizon for the future anyway, at least in early industrialized countries (Holzinger, 2016; Institut Solidarische Moderne, 2011, p. 11), and that, far from the elusive promises of poverty eradication and universal prosperity of growth advocates[108], the fulfillment of the promise of the growth-society would amount to threatening its very own survival (Miegel, 2010, pp. 100; 166).

The cultural axis of the growth-debate adds further complexity to the discursive landscape. A contraction in GDP is framed distinctly – often even contradictorily – by diverse actors in the debate: advocates of a 'green' or 'better' growth see anything deviating from the accustomed path of continued growth as punishing asceticism and backwardness (the 'back to the stone-age' argument). Instead, growth-critics foreground the convergence of psychological, social and ecological benefits[109] that

[108] Indeed, the precarious and artificial character of current growth (Jackson, 2009a, p. 6; Miegel, 2010, p. 181) meaning that growth fails even in its own terms, in providing for social stability. Furthermore, recent research has shown that, at current trickle-down rates, and due to the size-multiplier and time required, solving the poverty issue through increasing GDP is nothing short of delusional (Woodward, 2015). Historical evidence confirms this, as since the early 1980s growth has benefited exclusively the already well-off (Oxfam, 2016; Piketty, 2014)

[109] The'Easterlin paradox' (also known as "happiness-paradox or life-satisfaction paradox") (Jackson, 2009a, p. 34; Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014, p. 33) designates the decoupling of reported improvements in wellbeing from improvements in economic performance. While prosperity has undeniable material dimensions, it goes far beyond these to include social, psychological, (subjective wellbeing), moral, and spiritual/religious dimensions (49:39). In fact, material goods constitute a basis for individual welfare and social stability *only* in combination with the above stated non-material goods (Miegel, 2010, p. 236). The concept of prosperity itself requires deeper inquiry. Prosperity is not to be conflated with wellbeing or happiness; indeed: prosperity implies a balance between short-term arousal and long-term security. Furthermore, prosperity is inherently bounded concept: it is bounded by scale of global population and by ecological limits, and tied to intra- and inter-generational socio-moral dimensions (49:9; 49:47). Hence, success needs to be redefined accordingly, structurally providing individuals with sustainable resources to "avoid shame" and gain social recognition (49:78; 64:19) without transgressing the abovementioned boundaries: borrowing Tim Kasser*'s* categorization*, intrinsic values* (i.e. self-acceptance, affiliation, a sense of belonging to the community) need to be reinforced as psychologically opposed to *extrinsic values* (popularity, image and financial success), as the former yield double or triple dividend as compared to more materialistic lifestyles (49:79). Lastly, material prosperity should not be conflated with economic growth. Indeed, growth is charged with having

would result from an emancipation of the 'growth-dogma' (Jackson, 2009a, p. 89; Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014, p. 127), purposively distancing themselves from negative visions of curtailment and sacrifice (e.g. Jackson, 2009a, p. 35). The sacrificial connotations of de-growth are common, however, in the moral-conservative growth-critical strand. For Meinhard Miegel, the inevitable economic contraction merely amounts to a collective awakening from the ecologically suicidal hubris of (tendentially globalizing) Western lifestyles.

The growth-debate is home to a heated contest over the appropriation of positively-connoted signifiers such as *modernity*, *freedom*, *prosperity/ progress* or the *good life*: both growth-advocates and growth-critics claim to be supporting these ideas and values through mutually contradictory prescriptions[110]. Consequently, they mutually accuse each other of dogmatism and of obstructive behavior (e.g. Fücks, 2013, pp. 33, 36; Jackson, 2009a, p. 68; Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014, pp. 49, 150–151).

The change agents envisaged by each strand vary correspondingly: Growth-advocates (and the conservative growth-critical strand) expect the sovereign state and their groupings in international fora, enlightened consumers, as well as socially and environmentally responsible business to advance the transition. Growth critics, in turn, seek to create virtuous circles between politics and civil society: between regulators and NGOs; with prosumers and alternative economic projects, such as Transition Towns, urban gardening, and open commons communities; or else with social movements (peasant, indigenous, Degrowth, commons), trade unions, alternative economic and subsistence undertakings.

To be noted, however, is that, setting the issue of growth aside, prescriptions of both growth-critics and green Keynesians overlap to a large extent: massive public investment in eco-efficiency and renewable energies, redistribution, and regulation of financial markets are common demands (Schmelzer & Passadakis, 2011, p. 45). In the cultural front, however, even the basic diagnosis diverges between growth-advocates and detractors: whereas the latter blame materialism for destroying not

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caused pauperization, deculturation (especially destruction of popular cultures), and de-politization. While the former is visible especially in the Global South, the two latter ubiquitously display the harmful effects of growth (Latouche, 2009, p. 29).

[110] By way of example, consider the framings of "right to sufficiency" by Uta von Winterfeld (2011) or the "iron cage of consumerism" (Jackson, 2009a) challenging the framing of a "right to consumption" (Fücks, 2013, p. 137) through factoring-in socially and ecologically damaging positional social pressures toward consumption: "nobody should be forced into wanting to have ever more" (Winterfeld, 2011). For an overview of the prescriptive views of the diverse growth-critical strands in Germany, see Schmelzer (2015)

only nature, but also for reducing society, cultures, and individual lives to an engine of consumption, the former acknowledge only environmental degradation as problematic.

Local & regional (re-localization and regionalization):

This axial theme covers a discursive strand in the transformation debate that bases on the assumption of economic globalization as a substantial causal factor of the multiple interlinked global crisis (Brand, Omann, et al., 2013; Demirović & Attac, 2011; Dörre, 2009). According to Latouche, re-localization is, together with cultural change and sufficiency, one of the three most strategic axial themes (Latouche, 2009, p. 44), because it affects the everyday lives and jobs of millions, and enables virtuous synergies among all axial themes (Latouche, 2009, p. 34). The discourse here sets on a regained sense of autonomy, in the sense of lesser dependence on long and distant supply chains, including the control of accumulation and local definition of consumption patterns as result of a participatory process (Acosta, 2015a, p. 148). Local needs must be satisfied with local production, financing, etc. insofar possible (subsidiarity principle) (Acosta, 2015a, p. 147 and ff.; Paech, 2012, p. 122), based on the concept of the bioregion: a "complex set of local territorial systems with a high capacity for an ecological self-sustainability" (Latouche, 2009, p. 44). Every region's critical economic activity should be protected (Latouche, 2009, p. 47), thus encouraging local or regional development.
In addition, local provisioning is seen as a way of strengthening of community resilience (as opposed to the proliferation of "zones of sacrifice" in globalized market societies) as an anchor for the good life (Jackson, 2009a, p. 35). Building a "network of virtuous and interdependent transversal relations", with high-intensity democratic experimentalism, constitutes an effective barrier against neoliberalism and its crisis-proneness (Latouche, 2009, p. 47). This is particularly important for subsistence-critical economic activities (food, energy, then economy and financial resources – regional/ complementary currencies are often promoted in this discourse) for reasons of both supply-security and democratized access (Acosta, 2015a, p. 171; Biesecker et al., 2012, p. 154; Institut Solidarische Moderne, 2011, p. 16; Latouche, 2009, p. 49; Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014, p. 56; UNEP, 2012, p. 14). An example for of actually existing practices potentially underpinning this kind of developmental trajectory is perhaps most famously the *Transition Towns* movement, but also the "urban village", or the "slow city" movements, the cooperatives' movement, urban gardening, and street markets, food clusters and agro-

parks, as well as the numerous 100%-renewable energy towns and communities in Germany and beyond serve to illustrate this type of development.

Opponents to re-localization not only view it as a futile endeavor in an era of accelerating global interconnectedness, with hundreds of millions seeking to achieve the consumption status of global middle classes, sustained on the pillars of globalized job markets, mobility, and value chains (Fücks, 2013, p. 149), but also as an obstacle in the way towards a form of cosmopolitan "global citizenship". Against this, advocates stress that it is only capital and commodities that should be re-localized, while knowledge should be globalized (Bauwens, 2012b). Furthermore, only high-intensity local cells can deliver global democracy (Acosta, 2015a, p. 45). Politics and culture are to redefine the local as a primary drive in individual and collective life. With regard to technology – and the encouragement of global transfer of useful, clean technologies notwithstanding – locally developed and/or tailored, simple, "convivial" technology allows for regaining control and reducing individual and social stress (Acosta, 2015a, p. 152; Adloff, 2014; H. Rosa, 2010).

Restructuration of work

In the framework of this discussion, a reorganization of both waged- and non-waged labor in modern societies is deemed a key instrument for a GT, with an emphasis on reducing overall working time as a way of reducing unemployment in a post-growth world, and liberating time for other activities. In the wording of Hannah Arendt, *liberated time*[111] (which is excluded from the economic sphere) would allow not only for the two repressed components of the *vita activa* – the work of the artist or artisan and political activity – to be restored the same dignity as gainful labor, but also for the *vita contemplativa* to be rehabilitated (Latouche, 2009, p. 86), with the corresponding revaluation of non-materialistic values, such as conviviality and spirituality.

At the same time, work-reduction would allow for a more balanced ratio between so-called *productive* (which create economic exchange-value) and *reproductive* activities (non-remunerative 'care work' yields

[111] Following Thierry Paquot (2007), Latouche (Latouche, 2009, pp. 41, 85) speaks of *liberated* time as opposed to *free* time seeking to emphasize the subversive, anti-systemic character of the former. While in a market society free time, defined as a "left-over" from work and other obligations, and is destined to passive consumption from the health and leisure industries, liberated time is rather devoted to engaging creatively in shaping one's own existence.

a major part of social value creation, which, however, does not figure at all in GDP data)(Schmelzer & Passadakis, 2011, p. 89; Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014, p. 108). This would diminish the overall dependence on monetary income (Paech, 2012, p. 120).

Variants of the work-shortening argument can be grouped in two main strands: those advocating for a shorter working life (reduction of retirement age), on the one hand, and those seeking to redistribute work within the scope of working life (reduction of weekly working hours, sabbaticals, etc.). To yield transformative effects, the reorganization of work should further encompass the following dimensions: a) a rebalancing between factors of production away from the productivity of capital and labor towards productivity of resources; b) a revised international division of labor (with focus on re-localization of essential economic activities) to halt the exploitation of the South; c) the creation of green jobs in new sectors and activities (i.e. changing the content of work) (Acosta, 2015a, p. 155; Latouche, 2009, p. 84); and d) the dismantling of ecologically and socially damaging economic sectors/activities, the scope of which would have to be subject to political deliberation, and goes hand in hand with a major cultural shift (e.g. major cutbacks in advertising, tourism, transport, the car industry, agribusiness, biotechnologies, etc.). The first three of the above would have the net effect of increasing labor demand, while the last would reduce it.

A redistribution of available work would thus be required, with the likely neat effect of reduced quantity of waged labor (Acosta, 2015a, p. 155; Institut Solidarische Moderne, 2011, p. 13; Latouche, 2009, p. 79). This argumentative strand outrightly challenges the 'back-to-full-employment' narrative of green economy or green growth advocates (Fücks, 2013, p. 51). Conservatives envision a lesser role of the state in financing both the rent system or a capital-intensive economic transformation, and therefore argue for a work-life that is longer – making labor available to compensate for lower capital-intensity – yet less intensive, thus allowing for the re-constitution of strong family and communal solidarity-bonds. (Miegel, 2010, p. 226/7)

A holistic labor policy supporting care and family work, voluntary civic engagement, and new forms of self-provisioning (Schmelzer & Passadakis, 2011, pp. 80/1-89; Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014, p. 123) would offer potentially powerful synergies with other policy fields across the scope of the GT-axial themes: sufficiency policies; education policy; social security to make subsistence less dependent on work (e.g. universal basic income or UBI) (Jackson, 2009a, pp. 81; 91; Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014, p. 124); appropriate consumer and health policies, e.g. support for less speed in everyday life, promoting longer product life (Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014, pp. 30; 53), redistribution to reduce unproductive (and unsustainable) status competition in consumption; and cultural change steering

away from our "obsession with work" and productivism (Latouche, 2009, p. 40) and allowing for some degree of "re-enchantment of the world" (Latouche, 2009, p. 85).

Redistribution:

The axial theme *redistribution* presents a complex phenomenal structure: it is problematized varyingly either as a justice-wreaking device evening the injustices caused by an ensuing 'Great transformation' (or by the contemporary economic system which it seeks to overcome), or else as a powerful driver of the transformation itself, by virtue of its effects on social status competition. While for the former redistribution constitutes a matter of justice and/or a precondition for the social acceptability of a social-ecological transformation (legitimacy), for the latter the impact of redistribution helps the transformation become effectual (efficacy).
The argument of a 'transformative redistribution' largely takes root in the assumption that increased material equality constitutes a precondition for a reduction in the consumption of positional goods and services[112] (Jackson, 2009a; Latouche, 2009; Røpke, 2012; Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014). Positional consumption adds little to overall happiness (resembling a welfare zero-sum game) but contributes significantly to unsustainable resource throughput (ecological negative-sum game). Redistribution is thus key to dismantling perverse incentive for positional competition and the logic of consumerism (Jackson, 2009a, p. 73), with the corresponding growth-inhibiting and environmentally friendly effects.

Opponents claim that distribution issues are a source of social conflict and instability, so they should be sidelined as much as possible by clinging on to growth (Fücks, 2013, pp. 50; 121). Furthermore, conservative discourse opposes a moral sense of asceticism and solidarity as a remedy to consumerism, rather than redistribution, which is seen as "anti-natural" (Miegel, 2010, p. 37). Furthermore, *in lieu* of redistributive policy, direct compensatory financial transfers can provide both for "greening the economy" and for alleviating social stress derived thereof (OECD, 2011; UNEP, 2012; WBGU, 2011).

[112] As recent research has persuasively shown, the importance of income in welfare plays out in relative, positional terms vis-à-vis peer groups (Jackson, 2009a, p. 39; Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014, p. 28), although some have given more importance to consumption styles associated with higher income groups thatn to income itself (Delhey, Schneickert, & Steckermeier, 2017)

Redistribution is varyingly framed as an issue of reallocation of wealth and resources between north and south (key here is the discussion around the 'ecological debt'[113]), between the public and the private domain, and between capital-driven 'productive' and socio-ecological 'reproductive' activities. Instruments include a rights-based (global) resource-allocation (WBGU, 2011, p. 17), fiscal policy (Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014, p. 47) – tax on consumption, maximum wealth and income limits (Acosta, 2015a, p. 152; Paech, 2012, p. 139; Schmelzer & Passadakis, 2011, p. 84), etc. –, a solidarity-based citizen insurance to decouple social security from salaries (Institut Solidarische Moderne, 2011, p. 14; Schmelzer & Passadakis, 2011, p. 85); or at least a minimum insurance against poverty (Institut Solidarische Moderne, 2011, p. 28), etc. The idea of a *universal basic income*[114] (Blaschke, 2012) is also progressively gaining strength in the debate around redistribution. A universal basic income would address the crisis of reproductive work through financially securing care work, instead of commodifying it. (Biesecker et al., 2012, p. 19)

The discussion around redistribution also includes other elements beyond wealth and income, such as the allocation of available work across the workforce and among sectors (Acosta, 2015a, p. 155; Jackson, 2009a, p. 80), agricultural land, habitable space (Schmelzer & Passadakis, 2011, p. 70), non-renewable natural resources (Latouche, 2009, p. 29; WBGU, 2011, p. 20), and immaterial ones such as time and social recognition (Acosta, 2015a, p. 155; Paech, 2012, p. 56).
The distribution problem becomes more acute in a sustainable society, where constantly raising material increases cannot be taken for granted (Scherhorn, 2012, p. 91 ff.; Schmelzer & Passadakis,

[113] The concept of "ecological debt" has come to signify the environmental liability of the Global North for their (historical) exploitation and appropriation of natural resources and pollution in the Global South, although it has also been used with reference to intergenerational justice (e.g. Kibert, Thiele, Peterson, & Monroe, 2010). The term was coined by environmental organizations from the Global South since the mid-1990s; academic research on "ecological debt" and "ecologically unequal exchange" came later (for an overview see Rice, 2007; J. T. Roberts & Parks, 2009). The 'ecological debt' stands in tension with the argument about funding and technology transfer for the 'less developed' countries to mitigate and adapt to environmental change: it's not so much about *giving more* as about *taking less* from them (Latouche, 2009, p. 37).

[114] The discussion around a *Universal* or *Unconditional Basic Income* (UBI) is one of the policy-foci in the GT debate and beyond. A universal basic income is defined as an income guaranteeing the livelihood and societal participation, which is received without any type of return or any conditionalities or eligibility requisites. A variant could be a UBI tied to common good utilizations (Paech, 2012, p. 139). For an overview of this discussion see http://basicincome-europe.org/ubie/

2011, p. 84). However, there is a meta-question to fair redistribution: does that which is to be distributed have a fair origin, in the first place? (Paech, 2012, p. 23). Implicit in this meta-question is the fact that social standards for material welfare have risen disproportionately and are ecologically unsustainable. Indeed, the redistribution argument stands in ambivalent tension with the idea that the social appreciation of material welfare needs to decrease for evolutionary trajectories to stay within the ecological carrying capacity of the earth. A cultural change is thus required to redefine said standards. Moreover, a relatively equal income distribution seems to be a precondition for successful restructuration of the labor market (Jackson, 2009a, p. 81), which in turn is the most consensual measure to combat unemployment in a non-growing economy (p. 80). Redistribution is a prerequisite for guaranteeing rights such as existential security, participation in social life, shelter, health, education, and appropriate and meaningful paid work (Institut Solidarische Moderne, 2011, p. 15). Redistribution thus seems a key lever in the pursuit of a serene, convivial, and sustainable society (Latouche, 2009, p. 33), provided that interdependent linkages with other axial themes are properly acknowledged.

Democratization:

The axial theme democratization refers to the discussion about new forms of democratic steering of societal trajectories. In order to counter the historical *post-democratic* shift from a political regulating-state to a post-political 'competitor state' engaged in a regulatory race-to-the-bottom to attract capital in the global investment market (Crouch, 2004)[115], this sub-discourse presents high-intensity (re-)democratization as a remedy.

Circumventing the short-termism and lock-ins of representative democracy (Germany. Deutscher Bundestag, 2013, p. 481), requires a particular type of democratization, namely one which gives more

[115] Close variants on the thesis of *post-democracy* have been developed by Jaques Rancière (1999) and Sheldon Wolin (2008). Also Ingolfur Blühdorn (2007) conceives of the present situation in terms of post-democracy, though he conceptualizes it somewhat differently: the liberal consumer democracies of the West have lost their emancipatory character to a reactionary defense of acquired consumer-privileges, resulting in 'simulative democracies' incapable of delivering ecologically sustainable socio-economic arrangements, and unlikely to sustain themselves in the longer run. In Blühdorn's view, the only hope for democracy – as well as for ecological viability of modern societies – would be a radical transformation of the imaginaries of emancipatory politics away from the quest for ever increasing material abundance.

power to the citizens than to the state, or at least empowers both simultaneously (WBGU, 2011, p. 19; Wright, 2013). This reaches well beyond the incrementalistic mainstream policy-principles of participation, transparency, and accountability towards e.g. open agenda-setting processes (OECD, 2011, p. 17), participatory budgeting, and limiting lobbyism (Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014, p. 83). Democratization demands are directed also at international institutions. Furthermore, failure-friendly experimentalism is portrayed as a key feature of democratization. Claus Leggewie, for example, advocates new deliberative methods such as "future councils" to represent future generations at various decision-making scales and spheres (Nanz & Leggewie, 2016). Optimistic voices stress the fact that post-materialistic values and pro-environment attitudes are widely supported by the population, not only in early industrialized countries, but also by opinion leaders in emerging ones (WBGU, 2011, p. 7).

But the most peculiar strand of the democratization discourse in the framework of the GT debate refers to the *democratization of the economy*. This could be achieved, for example, through stakeholder and workers' (TUs) involvement in business decision-making (e.g. economic, social, and environmental councils from CSOs spanning from the micro- to the macro-level) (Institut Solidarische Moderne, 2011, pp. 16; 21), especially in key sectors like finance/banking and energy production. Bolder visionary proposals envisage an already ensuing reorganization of relations of production/consumption through peer-to-peer or open source communities, which opens up space for experimental combinations of democratic, hierarchical, and polyarchic (i.e. peer governance) forms of operational and political organization (Bauwens, 2012b, pp. 2–3).

Beyond political and economic democratization, this axial concept also subsumes discussions around a *democratization of culture*, understood as the de-colonialization of cultural imaginaries and 'cognitive justice' among diverse forms of knowledge (Acosta, 2015a, pp. 149–151; Santos, 2008). A distinct yet connected branch of this argumentative strand is the discussion about an intensified participation of civil society in the politics of science (Latouche, 2009, p. 71; Schneidewind, 2013a; WBGU, 2011, p. 21), a debate going back to diagnoses of structural risk of late modern societies (Beck, 1992) and post-normal science (Funtowicz & Ravetz, 1991, 1993; Gallopin et al., 2001), re-labeled for mainstreaming as *transformation science* and *transformative science* (Schneidewind, 2013b; WBGU, 2011, p. 21). Proposals here include, for example, a moratorium on techno-scientific innovation to democratically assess and re-orient efforts (Latouche, 2009, p. 71)

The relationship between democracy and the sustainability-transformation are more complex than that, however. Skeptics argue that sustainability (or social justice, for that matter) are not a likely result of spontaneous, free individual behavior in the framework of current liberal consumer-democracies. They put forward structural problems such as the territorial biases in the governance of trans-boundary issues (Institut Solidarische Moderne, 2011, p. 16), the relative slowness of democratic decision-making (as compared not only to single bottom-line, economic decision-making, but also to meritocratic, ad hoc, and distributed methods)(Bauwens, 2012b, pp. 2–3), the "tyranny of majorities", and the problem of "myopic choice" (Avner Offer, cited in Jackson, 2009a), which would lead to short-term bias at the expense of one's own long-term interests. One might add, though not explicitly mentioned, the bias towards 'feasibility' in contemporary political culture: idealism is culturally devaluated; instead, action, pragmatism, achievability, demonstrability have set through as the validation proof for the worth of ideas, actions, and persons. This leads to a paradox of inverse proportionality between efficacy and control, on the one hand, and scope of impact, on the other: the more effective an intervention, the more irrelevant it is in terms of advancing a whole-societal transformation, but the higher it will be prioritized in a political culture that privileges 'achievability' over 'impact'. Against these arguments, democratization advocates stress that the empowering local deliberative communities with greatest possible autonomy (conceived not as microcosm, but as a connected interdependent network) would facilitate democratizing the economy, strengthen integration and solidarity (Jackson, 2009a, p. 91; Latouche, 2009, p. 50); and would smoothen the path towards a convivial culture which is more ready to endorse strong sustainability measures (Latouche, 2009, p. 56). A high-energy democracy would lead to institutive activity with the power to transform, which puts the social imaginary into action and supersedes (a locked-into the status quo) traditional party-politics as a transformative agent (pp. 65-67).

Agents to enact high-intensity democratization are the reformed state – a "proactive" (WBGU, 2011, p. 19), an "enabling" or "partner" state (Bauwens, 2012b, p. 7), with enlarged citizen participation –, civil society (key for legitimation), science, and committed forces in the economy. A spearhead function is attributed variably to either utopia-capable groups in societal niches forming a civic 'coalition of the willing' – indigenous movements, rural and urban communities (e.g. transition towns) – (Acosta, 2015a, p. 165), or else to individuals in their role as citizens and consumers (Fücks, 2013, p. 160), networked thanks to the internet (p. 298).

Sufficiency:

The axial theme *sufficiency* covers the diverse considerations regarding the significance of a reduction in levels of material consumption. The sectors of food, construction, housing, and mobility are responsible for 60 to 70 percent of consumption-originated ecological pressure (Stengel, 2011, p. 289). By problematizing the 'demand-side' of the prevailing socio-economic system, the concept of "sufficiency" seeks to complement (and simultaneously to challenge the totalitarian aspirations of) the dominant concepts of "efficiency" and (to a lesser degree) "consistency", which focus exclusively on the 'supply-side' (i.e. production patterns). The concept of 'sufficiency' was introduced in the 1990s by Wolfgang Sachs (1994), who summarized it in four pillars: less speed, less distance, less material encumbrance, and less dependence on markets and commerce in life. Key to a sufficiency strategy are thus re-localization (Latouche, 2009, p. 69), decommodification, de-acceleration, and a cultural change placing greater social appreciation on immaterial values.

The debate is framed as a struggle for the appropriation of meaning of key liberal values, mainly *freedom*[116]. While sufficiency-advocates highlight the consumption patterns of early industrialized countries as the main cause of the global ecological crisis, sufficiency-critics warn of the danger of a "tyranny of virtue" in the name of the ecology, i.e. an unwarranted intrusion of regulative powers into the right to free choice of the individual (Fücks, 2013, pp. 46; 118; 150). For sufficiency critics, "not the transformation of men is the business of ecological politics, but the transformation of the industrial society" (Fücks, 2013, p. 46). Sufficiency-advocates reply that focusing solely on the supply-side of the economy without transforming demand-patterns creates a structural incentive towards externalization (Lessenich, 2016), giving way to "imperial ways of life" (Brand & Wissen, 2011) which depend on the plundering of nature and labor in the global south for their own reproduction. (Acosta, 2015a, p. 81; Institut Solidarische Moderne, 2011, p. 14; Paech, 2012, p. 11; Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014, p. 125; Stengel, 2011)

Alongside this legitimacy question, the question is raised of whether sufficiency politics would be fit for the purpose of achieving a sustainable society, in the first place. An established argument portrays

[116] Cf. Section 3.3.3 on GT framings for extensive treatment.

sufficiency as requiring a deep cultural change as precondition, which would take longer than we can afford in the face of the ecological crisis. Others argue, in diametrical opposition, that sufficiency strategies are the most effective and time-efficient way of obtaining substantial reduction in levels of consumption (demand-side). Indeed, while e*fficiency* and *consistency*[117] strategies (supply-side) are also regarded as necessary, they are entirely dependent on technological innovation, which is largely unplannable, and require time-consuming development of physical and market infrastructures. Furthermore, by and of themselves, efficiency strategies may lead away from rather than toward sustainability, mainly due to so-called "rebound-effects" (Jackson, 2009a, pp. 62; 76; Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014, pp. 18–20). Sufficiency strategies, in turn, do not generate rebound-effects. Furthermore, the needed reduction of 80% in material throughput can be achieved by massive cuts in positional consumption, which doesn't add to welfare (Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014, p. 15), and 'intermediate consumption', including wasteful disposable consumption (in a broader sense, also transport, energy, packaging, advertising). According to Hulot (2006, p. 237, cited in Latouche, 2009, p. 38), eighty percent of goods traded on the market are used only once, and then go straight into the dustbin.

Yet even if sufficiency is about reducing consumption, its framing as a matter of resigned deprivation is attributable to an unfortunate bias in public and scientific communication, "portraying sufficiency as a burden and excess as a virtue" (Miegel, 2010, p. 14): indeed, research in happiness and subjective wellbeing has consistently shown that, far from feeling deprived, 'simplifiers' are actually happier (Jackson, 2009a, p. 89; Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014, p. 16). Hence, sufficiency does not mean only *less* (stuff); it also means *more* (freedom, happiness, time, longer product duration, etc.) (Jackson 2009,

[117] *Consistency* is a generic term for the more widely diffused "circular economy", i.e. the substitution of the linear system of extraction-production-consumption-disposal by a circular one, where the output of one process always becomes the input for another one. While such an approach obviously constitutes an adequate solution to local ecological systems, it appears problematic as a global approach as a result of at least the following reasons: a) it focuses exclusively on the supply side of the economy, ignoring the demand-side; b) it does not raise the question of which level of biosphere deterioration is admissible before the circular dynamics is established (i.e. it ignores the fact that current global throughput is already ca. 50% above the ecological carrying capacity of the Earth, and up to 600% above in trend-setting countries such as the USA); c) it does not raise the question of what counts as 'resouce': do bees or coral reefs (both critical to ecosystems of potentially global impact) count, for example?; and d) does not raise the question of how the necessary changes are to be politically implemented: democratically or autocratically; in centralized or decentralized fashion; following an egalitarian or a polarized pattern; etc.

88; Paech 2012, 128;130). Going for sufficiency does not imply going 'against modernity', as often portrayed by ecological modernizers (Fücks, 2013, pp. 36; 52); rather the contrary: it amounts to enlightened liberalism and future optimism: "A society seeking the proper balance between too much and too little, between acceleration and deceleration, market and self-provisioning, the global and the local, is more colorful and requires much more imagination than one that follows only the linear compulsion of escalation" (Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014, p. 145). Furthermore, it would allow people to re-gain some degree of control over their own life (Acosta, 2015a, p. 36). While ecological modernizers admit frugal lifestyles as a matter of individual *lifestyle* choice (Fücks, 2013, p. 118), sufficiency is typically framed as a matter of structural *ways of life*. The relationality and relativeness of needs vis-à-vis social milieus and standards is emphasized (Schmelzer & Passadakis, 2011, p. 53; Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014, p. 27), so that the right to meaningful social participation of any given individual is contingent upon societal parameters. Sufficiency thus requires the institutionalization of collective choice (Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014, p. 157). In this vein, Uta von Winterfeld (Winterfeld, 2011, p. 64 ff.) criticizes current homogenizing pressures towards economization and consumerism: the alleged freedom behind the "right to consume" is deconstructed by opposition to the "right to sufficiency" – i.e. the right no to be "forced into wanting to have ever more".

What can we learn from the analysis of phenomenal structures of the axial themes in the GT debate?

Even this very condensed description of the phenomenal structure of each of the axial themes above conveys an idea of the bewildering complexity of the discursive field of the GT. This should not come as a surprise, given that we are dealing with a meta-discursive arena, as was anticipated at the beginning of this chapter. Yet the ultimate purpose of this analysis remains distilling some cross-cutting insights into the GT debate as a whole: In the end, our goal is understanding how the sub-discourses around each axial theme coalesce, with their tensions and affinities, into a macro-picture of whole-societal change in the dominant (westernized) model of modern society. The juxtaposition of the phenomenal-structures of each axial theme or sub-discourse should allow for the identification of transversal categories and topics of dispute, on the basis of which an outline of the overarching problem-structure of the GT debate has been attempted.

Table 2 below offers such patchwork-like overview of the phenomenal structure of the broader GT debate, based on the three analytical categories mentioned at the beginning of this chapter (uniting, divisive, and bridging elements).

Table 2: Summary of categorial and content-dimensions of the GT debate as per analysis of phenomenal structures

AXIAL THEME	CATEGORIAL STRUCTURE	CONTENT STRUCTURE		
		UNITES	DIVIDES	BRIDGES
cultral change	As object or outcome of transformation	contest on how best to achieve a 'green culture'	- culture ('Mental infrastructures') as object of transformation? - building of emancipatory framework-conditions (constructivist) vs attack on individual freedoms (autonomist)	cultural embeddedness constraining individual
Commons	- utilization vs property - factors of production or consumption goods - material (land) vs immaterial (knowledge)	Contest over better way of protecting rapidly depleting common pool of resources Shared utilization of consumption goods widely accepted (e.g. the 'sharing economy')	- Ownership of material or immaterial goods (esp. factors of production) disputed: 'Tragedy of the commons' vs disposession & externalization argument (land-grabbing) - Mere resource-protection debate vs a broader debate about impacts on the social bond	Changing energy-communications matrix enabling shift in power relations to re-embed markets into societal relations
GDP growth	- technical-economic axis - cultural axis - ecological axis	- BAU is not an option - contest over the definition of positively connoted signifiers such as modernity, freedom, prosperity/ progress or the good life	- Growth compatible with (precondition for) sustainability vs. growth dilemma (i.e. stability vs. sustainability) - 'Decoupling hypothesis' possible (already happening) vs decoupling impossible / extremely unlikely - growth itself as problem (degrowth) vs growth-dependency as problem (a-growth) - Degrowth everywhere vs degrowth in affluent countries - Degrowth as punishing asceticism and backwardness vs degrowth as liberation and good life	- short-term green growth invested in creating preconditions for overcoming growth-dependency - Common demands: massive public investment in eco-efficiency and renewable energies, redistribution, and regulation of financial markets
local & regional	cultural dimension security dimenson ecological dimension	strengthened relationality and solidarity bonds	- autonomy, high-energy democracy, and resilience (subsistence-critical economic activities) vs localization as a futile endeavor in a globalized world and an obstacle in the building of a 'global citizenship'.	capital and (subsistence-critical) commodities to be localized, while knowledge / clean (insofar possible convivial) technologies should be globalized
work restructuration	- division of labor btw. a) waged- and non-waged labor b) productive and reproductive work c) international - content of work (e.g. 'green jobs')	- structural unemployment to grow in future (Industry 4.0) - green jobs replacing brown jobs - major part of social value creation not accounted for in 'productive' sectors	- generalized productivity imperative vs. shift focus from productivity of labor and capital to productivity of resources - revised (international, inter-gender, waged- and non-waged) division of labor vs mere revision of content of work (e.g. green jobs) - redistribution of available work vs "back to full employment" - working life reduction vs working life expansion (to compensate for the lesser intensity of capital) - holistic labor policy (supporting care, self-provisioning, and civic engagement) vs compensatory transfer to disadvantaged	working week reduction to combat unemployment and allow for care work and socio-political engagement

redistribution	- redistribution of what? A) wealth and income B) available work C) Land (inhabit and work) D) non-renewable resources E) intangibles (time, soc. recognition) - purpose of redistribution - ecological equilibrium point for redistribution - redistribution btw.: a) north and south (e.g. ecological debt) b) public-private domain c) capital and (re)productive activities	greening' the economy requires a certain level of redistribution (from brown to green and reproductive sectors)	- Continued growth (mechanism for social stability, source of revenues for transformation, etc.) vs (or precondition for) redistribution - Redistribution as instrument for transformation (trumping positional consumption, increasing social harmony,etc.) vs redistribution as compensatory cash transfer to 'losers' from the transformation - redistribution as source of social instability vs. inequality as source of social instability - redistribution (policy-level) vs asceticism and solidarity (moral appeal) as a remedy to consumerism	UBI decoupling social security from income, power leverage between employers and job-seekers, spares resources through downsizing bureaucratic state
democratization	- Empowered subject: citizens or state? - democratization of what: a) political life b) economy c) culture (de-colonialization of imaginaries) d) science	Experimentalism (e.g. future councils, international democracy, etc.)	- Political democracy: Enlarged participation vs. high-intensity democracy - political democracy (limit lobbyism, participatory budgeting) vs economic democracy (worker and stakeholder involvement in business decision-making) - democratization as plain goal vs experimental combinations of democratic, hierarchical, and polyarchic (i.e. peer governance) forms of operational and political organization to solve problems of territorial bias, 'tyrannies of the majorities', 'myopic choice' (short-term bias), and structural incapability for expanded deliberation (scale, slowness, etc.) - improving institutions vs expanding institutive power of the social imaginary - initiative by individuals (consumers, citizens) or niche groups vs. institutional speerheading	proactive', 'enabling' or 'partner' state correcting legitimation deficits simultaneously empowering communities (strenghtening integration, solidarity, conviviality)
sufficiency	- desirability : curtailment/ sacrifice vs liberation/ positive discrimination -feasibility	- Freedom - Efficiency (with provisions for rebound-effects) - consistency	- "making it easier to live the good life" vs "tyranny of virtue" - object of transformation: supply-side (production patterns) vs demand-side (consumption patterns) - "right to development" (normative) vs "imperial ways of life" / "externalization-societies" (descriptive) - fesasibility: "no time to wait for cultural change" vs. sufficiency as fast-track to sustainability - material werlfare argument vs. welfare-neutral cuts in intermediate and positional consumption	- freedom - justice: "Right to sufficiency"

			- deprivation (less stuff) vs gain (freedom, happiness, time, product duration) - "enemies of modernity" vs enlightened liberalism and future optimism	

What transversal insights into the structure of the GT discursive field can be gained from this mosaic? Looking at the column 'categories in the discussion', a *prima facie* realization is that diverse dimensions are often overlooked and rendered invisible behind a common header: *democratization* stands for both incrementally improved 'participation', 'transparency', and 'accountability' in existing formal institutions of representative (post)democracy, on the one hand, and for radical economic (i.e. stakeholder- and worker-involvement) and cultural democratization ('cognitive justice' or 'decolonization of the imaginary'), on the other. Hence the *object* of democratization (institutional politics, communal life, economy, culture) becomes blurry, but so does the *subject* to be empowered for democratizing purposes (state, organized civil society, citizen constituencies?) (Wright, 2013). Also, the need for a profound *cultural change* is widely acknowledged, but while some regard culture as the direct target of collectively defined transformative interventions, others frame cultural change as the byproduct of shifting trends in consumer-preferences and socially and ecologically responsible business-policies. Cultural change *as object* and cultural change *as outcome* thus become confused. Similarly, the sub-discourse around *commons* (discussion property vs. utilization of diverse possible material or immaterial goods) and *work re-structuration* (around the social and economic significance and division of labor), are often conflated with the 'sharing economy' (i.e. the private provisioning of shareable utilization services, be it cars, housing, etc.) and a better remuneration of workers in the care-service market, respectively. Even *redistribution* (with varying references to object, beneficiaries, purpose) is invoked with dissimilar and sometimes narratively antagonistic tenets (e.g. consider the arguments of redistribution as *lever for* vs redistribution as *buffer of* the transformation). By implication, democratization, cultural change, commons, work restructuration, and redistribution, can be understood as "floating signifiers" (Laclau, 2001), which, by virtue of what Foucault would call their "tactical polyvalence", can be seen as conceptual touching stones providing ground for "discursive affinities"[118] (Hajer, 2006). That is, meaning-construction around these axial themes will likely remain

[118] While this blurry discursive character of the axial themes mentioned can be partly attributed to their synthetic character as endogenously constructed categories for the purpose of this study (to be remembered, the axial theme 'labels' emerged from a process of subsumption and synthesis – see

ambiguous and thus turn them into good rendezvous-points for contesting discourses by providing an ideational platform for dialogue yet deflecting open confrontation.

On the other hand, and although similar categorial complexity can be observed for the axial theme *local* & *regional* (security/autonomy dimension, cultural dimension, ecological dimension), the referential bearings here leave less room for ambiguity. Same is valid for the more linear, rugged, and intertwined debate about both the feasibility and desirability of *GDP-growth* and *sufficiency*. As a result, these three axial themes can be said to constitute the 'thematic hotspots' of the GT debate, where subtler discursive affinities are likely to play lesser of a role than bold (and more explicit) argumentative struggle.

Beyond the analysis of categorial structures, Table 2 – in triangulation with insights from state of the art literature, and the detailed analysis of coded text-excerpts – also suggests cross-cutting commonalities, cleavages, and potential bridges in the contents of the GT debate as a whole. In some cases, the identification of cleavages, commonalities, or bridges proceeds almost directly, as they are made explicit in the data. In most cases, however, a stronger interpretative mediation is needed, due to the already mentioned lack of explicit and thorough mutual engagement among participants in the GT debate with each other´s arguments (Diefenbacher et al., 2014, p. 36; von Jorck, 2013a). This interpretative process should thus be regarded, first and foremost, as a moment of generation of categories and hypothesis to be ratified through the ensuing results of narrative and frame analysis, rather than as conclusive findings from the analysis of phenomenal structures.

As should be expected, commonalities across a discursive field transversed by fundamental contestations are in short supply and rather vague in their definition. Nevertheless, beyond commonplace consensual formulas such as 'sustainable development' or 'intergenerational justice', two shared assumptions with substantial implications for the definition of the scale, scope, and quality of a 'Great transformation' could be identified:

First, the prospect of a 'Great Transformation' is framed either as an evolutionary inevitability (even as already unfolding) or as a desirable political goal, and thus to be deliberately fostered, or at least accompanied, by political, social, and economic governance-agents. Ultimately, the ecological systemic boundaries or "planetary boundaries" (Rockström et al., 2009; Steffen et al., 2015), if anything else, will force the transformation upon the social world. In other words, a policy of incremental changes

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section 2.1 – which is 'reversed' in the analysis of phenomenal structures), it is equally true that the subsumption and labeling process drew largely on empirically utilized language, which validates their interpretation as *floating signifiers*.

to the status quo is actively produced as a non-available discursive option. This readiness to accept radical changes should not come as a surprise, Alex Demirovic (2012) argues, insofar the inherent logic of modern capitalist societies is a fundamentally transformative one. The decisive question of the GT debate is thus one about *if* there will be a transformation, but *what* transformation it will be: in other words, what type of transformation will allow to minimize its negative impacts and seize its positive effects for the general population? Is it a continuation of the dominant logic of profit-making, capital accumulation, and the concomitant expansion of the economy; or does this logic need to be superseded by a rivaling logic of social organization? And our analysis shows – in line with Ulrich Brand's (2014b) – that it is precisely the problematization of this logic which characterizes the GT debate, as opposed to the mainstream sustainable development discourse.

Drawing on Gramsci, Brand argues that for such contention leading to a shift in social and political hegemony, however, it requires a correlation with the development of the material base. And this is where the second cross-cutting shared assumption comes in: Socio-technical developments (Big Data, Artificial Intelligence, IoT technologies) have the potential to trigger a fundamental shift in the production systems of modern societies. Be it the 'Industry 4.0' discourse on the "smart factory", with its disruptive consequences for employment[119], or the co-evolutionist yet emancipatory P2P-discourse, a radical re-structuration (read: shrinking) of the labor market is viewed as inevitable, and, with it, a major re-structuration of the fundamental pillars of social organization. This creates an unprecedented basis for consensus across the discursive spectrum (which, to become effective, would still require active brokerage) around proportionally radical measures to 'combat unemployment' and securing minimum livable income, such as a *Universal Basic Income*, work reduction, substantially enlarged self-provision capabilities (through strengthened solidarity bonds, ranging from personal family/clan relations to impersonal P2P-networks, with more or less systematic assistance on the part of the state), etc. Worthwhile observing is that, regardless of the intentions or the forces setting these processes in motion, these perspectives of structural-material change open-up a historical window of opportunity for emancipatory GT-discourses, making them appear plausible, and thus strengthening

[119] "Industry 4.0" refers to the current trend towards further automation in industrial manufacturing. The label 'Industry 4.0' had its origin in a project of the German Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF), which seeks to foster these developments in manufacturing technologies. See: https://www.bmbf.de/de/zukunftsprojekt-industrie-4-0-848.html

their performative power as "real utopias" (cf. Section 1.2 in Chapter 1). Sticking to the prior example, the scale-efficiencies of vertically integrated capitalist enterprises and ensuing technological developments (such as 3-D printing) have created the socio-technical preconditions for the development of open-source, P2P value-creation, which – while resonating with well-established cultural values such as autonomy, entrepreneurship, meritocracy – would yield radically distributed and democratized access goods and services at affordable cost (Rifkin, 2014).

Secondly, with regard to disputes, the field-wide analysis of the GT-debate' phenomenal structure also sheds interesting insights. Central cleavages across the GT debate are, on the one hand, *technical matters with disputed assessments* (particularly, the possibility of decoupling pollution and resource-throughput through technological advancements and efficiency-gains, which we termed *decoupling hypothesis*), and, on the other, *disputed signifiers* (what accounts for modern? What is prosperity? What is freedom? What is happiness?) and *value-attributions* (sufficiency as curtailment vs. sufficiency as freedom; freedom as unfettered consumerism vs. freedom from the "fatigue and clutter" of consumerist culture, etc.). Not surprisingly, disputed signifiers and value-attributions – but incidentally also disputed technical matters – revolve mainly around two of the thematic hotspots identified in the categorial analysis: GDP growth and sufficiency.

Thus far, from the analysis of phenomenal structures alone, we have identified areas which, at least in part, explain which meaning-structures served as catalyzers for the GT debate: democratization, cultural change, and, to a lesser extent, redistribution served as umbrella concepts or floating signifiers for discussants to coalesce, regardless of the fact that, on closer inspection, they would often (dis)agree or maybe even just talk past each other. Also, the common perception of inevitability of a major social transformation and a sense of a historical opportunity-window presented by socio-economic and/or socio-technical developments lie at the common base, so that a 'new social contract' (cf. WBGU) can and must be drawn.

Thirdly and lastly, and departing from the cleavages identified above, what kind of meaning-brokerage can be observed at action; and what brokerage would be needed to make further progress down the transformative road? Drawing on the above identified types of cleavages – technical issues, disputed signifiers and controversial value-attributions –, bridging articulations result (or cold be potentially be built) through:

- disputing univocal appropriations of widely accepted or positively connotated signifiers (freedom, happiness, prosperity, modernity) by breaking chains of equivalence (e.g. prosperity equal economic growth equal material welfare equal subjective wellbeing / happiness) (Reißig, 2014, p. 72)
- factoring-in commonly ignored implications or feedback loops (e.g. Miegel's diagnosis "we are living beyond *our* means" is challenged and complexified by Stephen Lessenig's argument that "we are living beyond the means *of others*")
- Articulating complementarities to challenge the polarizing edge of divisive arguments; e.g. sufficiency-policies as a complement (rather than an alternative) to efficiency- and consistency-oriented ones; short-term with long-term measures, such as green growth in the short and structural redesign away from growth in the longer run, etc.
- translating more sophisticated theories of the social (accounting for dialectical relationalities, systemic interdependencies, cultural and power-structural embeddedness, etc.) into concrete transformative interventions which seem promising in political and cultural terms (e.g. UBI, work-restructuration) (Kopatz, 2016; Shove, 2010a)

The lessons gained through the analysis of phenomenal structures are insightful towards an understanding of the emergence, current development of the GT debate, as well as for future transformative learning-prospects. Yet these building-blocks are not discursively articulated in a vacuum, but rather as part of *narrative structures* that function as container through which discourses (and all their constitutive elements) are transported in meaning-making processes. The following section is devoted to the reconstruction of such structures, that will grant access to the 'big picture' of the diversity of narratives at play in the GT debate.

3.3.2. Narrative analysis of the GT discourses

Although vague and fragmentary narrative contours of GT discourses became apparent already through the analysis of phenomenal structures, this section seeks to ratify and build on those preliminary insights to deliver a full-fledged narrative analysis of the GT field of discourse. This analysis unfolds in three sequential steps: the first step aims at providing a synthetic yet systematic proto-narrative articulation of the axial themes of the GT debate, based on the sampled strategy-

papers (Sample 1). The resulting 'proto-narrative alignments' serve as an indicator of the likely narrative affinity among the diverse GT-strategies and their respective proponents. The second step uses these provisional categorization (filtered through the criteria of minimal and maximal contrasting) to analyze the narratives contained in Sample 1 through the Actantial Model by Julien Greimas. The third and last step builds on the Greimas-analysis to infer, outline, and analyze stylized or ideal-typical storylines narratively structuring the GT debate. These stylized narratives or storylines will thereafter become our main unit of analysis for the remaining of the chapter.

Comparison of representative GT strategies:

Based on the primary data (Sample 1), as well as insights from existing literature, the hypothesis of departure in our narrative analysis is that the German GT debate constitutes a heterogeneous and fragmentary field, where participants often do not engage thoroughly with each other´s arguments, thereby rendering the structuring of the field (i.e. the identification of commonalities, differences, and contradictions) a difficult task (Diefenbacher et al., 2014, p. 36).

A preliminary effort at such structuration will be undertaken by way of analyzing the strategy papers sampled for fine analysis (Sample 1), which are representative of *comprehensive GT strategies* in the sense that they meaningfully combine diverse axial themes into a storyline of how a GT is (or should be made) to unfold. The structuration will ensue by means of a systematic comparison of the relative positioning of each author towards each of the axial themes: advocative, declining, or neutral. Such structuration would allow for the building of broad 'narrative alignments', which will, in turn, serve as a basis for an integral narrative analysis.

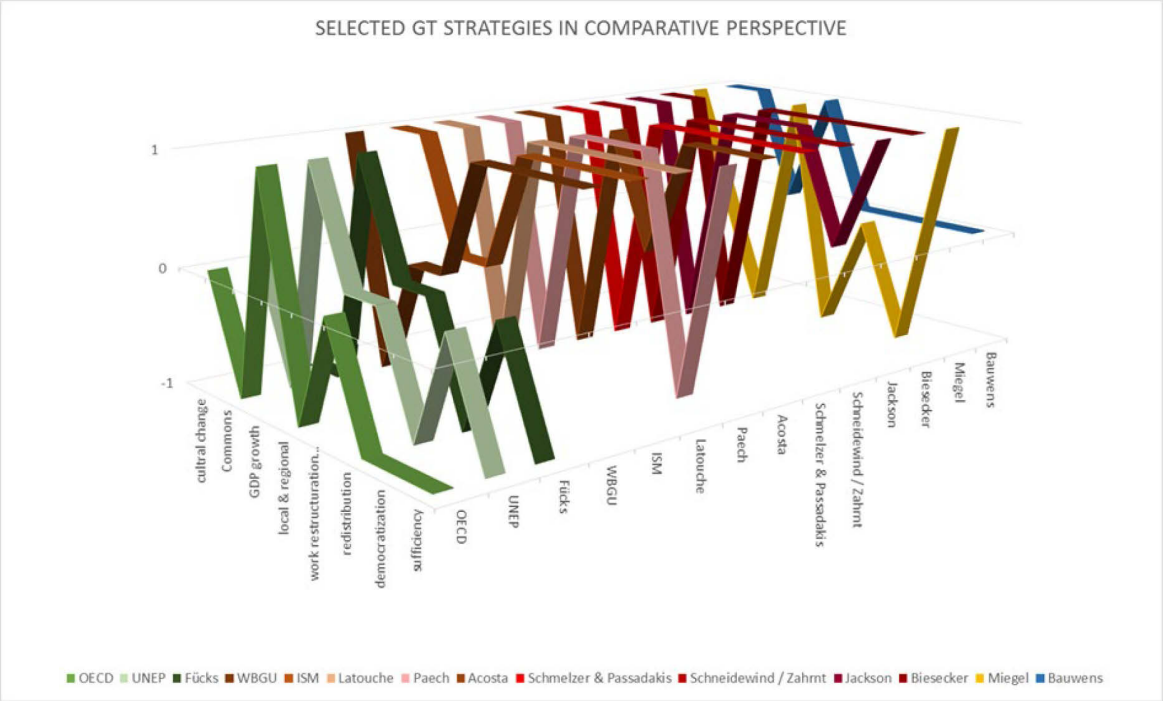
However, a number of problems and limitations soon become apparent in such analysis. The first problem is that, in some cases, unambiguous positioning cannot be identified from the primary data. In cases of ambiguity, positioning has been inferred from (properly referenced) secondary literature, whenever possible. In the cases where secondary literature did not shed any new light on the matter, a neutral position has been accorded to the particular strategy vis-à-vis the axial theme under consideration.

A second problem emerges when a given axial theme receives only limited or conditioned support: redistribution, for example, is often supported only insofar it is combined with an actively fostered

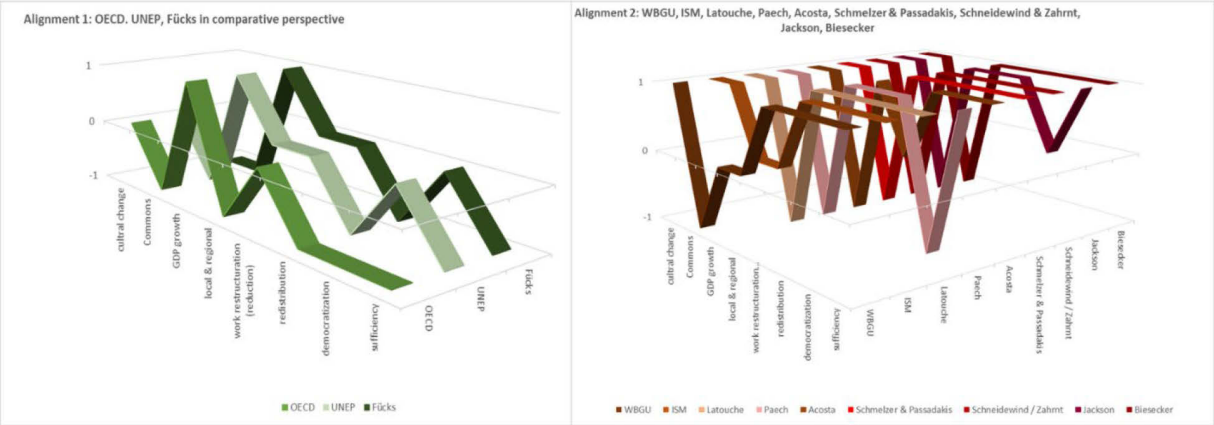
cultural change towards sufficiency-oriented ways of life, a reform of the work-regime liberating time for non-productivist and non-consumerist activities, or even a promotion of modern subsistence-economies. (Latouche, 2009)

This comparative analysis of the sampled transformation strategies for each axial theme yielded the graph shown in Figure 1, where 1 stands for a positive position towards a given axial theme in the strategy under consideration, 0 for a neutral one, and -1 for a declining position.

Figure 1: Selected GT Strategies in comparative perspective



From Figure 1, two broad patterns of alignment can be easily identified on simple visual inspection: OECD, UNEP, and Fücks, on the one hand, and the rest of the texts, on the other – with the exception of Miegel and Bauwens, which follow a clearly different pattern from both the mentioned alignments.



The texts in the second alignment broadly advocate the following axial themes in common: an actively fostered *cultural change*, a relative de-commodification and *re-commonalization* of social and economic life (except for the WBGU, which remains committed to the idea of strong property rights as a grounding for transformation); a *dismantling of the growth-dependency* of modern capitalist economies, a fundamental *re-structuration and re-balancing of gainful and non-gainful work*, a systematic *redistributive* intervention to unbuild structural inequalities (primarily, but not only, in material resources), political and economic *democratization* (with a skeptic reservation about the transformative potential of 'consumerist democracies' on the part of Niko Paech and Tim Jackson), and *sufficiency* as a political project.

But it is here where the above announced limitations of such rudimentary structuration become apparent: As the analysis of phenomenal structures in the previous section revealed, there is significant internal complexity and heterogeneity to each of the axial themes. Furthermore, while broadly outlining discursive positions, these sets of distinctly articulated axial themes do not provide sufficient information for the purpose of reconstructing the respective narrative structures in which they are embedded: a proper analysis of the plot and its elements (the characters, the point of departure or the vision pursued by each narrative) is thus complementarily required.

Actantial Model analysis (Greimas) of GT-narratives

The Actantial Model, developed by A.J. Greimas, breaks a narrative plot down into six facets or *actants*: (1) The *subject* (for example, to use the wording of our own analytical categories: the change agents) is the agential driver towards (2) an *object* or *goal* (the vision of the future), with the aid of a (3) *helper* (instrumental means or favorable circumstances). The (4) *sender* is what instigates the action (the epochal diagnosis), while the (5) *receiver* is what benefits from it (called here: beneficiaries). Lastly, (6) an *opponent* (obstacles, anti-subject) seeks to hinder the action. Since a relatively detailed description of how transformative actions are to be carried out plays a central role for the purpose of our analysis, the category of (7) *basic strategy* (plot key markers) will be added to the original Greimas-scheme.

The purpose of this stage of analysis is to reconstruct the basic narratives at play in the GT debate, basing on the broad alignments hypothesized above. The Actantial-analysis (synthesized in Table 3) confirmed that for the three GT-strategies originally grouped under the header 'Alignment 1' in Figure 1 (hereafter *Green Economy,* and identifiable with green color in tables and figures), differences are negligible in terms of their respective narrative structures. Similarly, the two stand-alone strategies – Miegel's *Conservative Contraction* (identifiable with yellow color) and Bauwens' *P2P society* (blue color) – were found to indeed be clearly distinguishable from the rest in narrative terms. The GT strategies grouped under the header 'Alignment 2' (hereafter *Green Society*[120]*,* identifiable with reddish colors), however, showed greater complexity and heterogeneity in their respective narrative attributions of meaning. This resulted in 5 sub-groups (cf. Table 3): *New Social Contract, Solidarity-based Modernity, Sufficiency-oriented Liberalism, (Re)productivism,* and *Post-Development*, which, in turn, coalesce varyingly according to various criteria and degrees of overlapping. These sub-groupings eventually proved relevant as a referential source for inquiring into finer discursive articulations (cf. Section 3.4 on Integral Analysis), but the structuring units for subsequent analysis will remain the four basic narrative alignments identified in Figure 1, which constitute also the main headers of Table 3

[120] The concept of "Green Society" as opposed to that of a "Green Economy" was borrowed from Diefenbacher et al. (2014)

Table 3: Synthetic view of Greimas analysis of GT narratives

	GREEN ECONOMY (Alignment 1)	GREEN SOCIETY (Alignment 2)					CONSERVATIVE CONTRACTION	P2P
				Unbundling 1		Unbundling 2		
		NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT	SOLIDARITY-BASED MODERNITY	SUFFICIENCY-ORIENTED REFORMISM	(RE)PRODUCTIVISM	POST-DEVELOPMENT		
Narrator(s)	OECD, UNEP, Fücks	WBGU	ISM	Jackson, Schneidewind & Zahnrt	von Winterfeld, Wichterich, & Biesecker	Paech, Latouche, Acosta	Miegel	Bauwens
Diagnosis (roots of crisis)	Capital allocation failure / unsuitable regulation.	unsustainable production and consumption patterns.	"Imperial modes of living" (Brand & Wissen)	disproportionate/ obsessive political pursuit of growth. fixation with foreign supply, consumerism, capitalist accumulation, separation of so-called productive and re-productive work	Productivist obsession. Separation of so-called productive and re-productive work	Inherent expansionism and wealth-concentration of capitalist development	Society and the state 'live beyond their (social and natural) means'. End of growth is not a political goal, but a fact commanding societal adaptation	artificial scarcity creation through commodification underpinning capitalist accumulation as source of social and ecological crises.
Goal	transformation of production patterns (marginally only consumption)	Wholesale societal and economic transformation of a Polanyian scale (including forms of political organization and cultural values)	(materially) universalizable ways of life (i.e. relative equality + sustainability), better balance of diverse dimensions of life	a resilient socio-economic order with a non-materialistic view of prosperity and multiplicity of lifestyles co-existing in global responsibility	Care society: "re-foundation of the economy": politically driven ecological and social re-embeddedness of markets	a resilient socio-economic order with a non-materialistic view of prosperity and multiplicity of lifestyles co-existing in global responsibility	Roll-back of consumerist culture and overcoming state obsession with (paid) jobs and growth.	Fostered emergence of commons-based economy as new mode of valuation (i.e. re-embeddedness of market dynamics).and of a *glocalist* cosmopolitan society based on collaboratively generated open knowledge
Basic strategy	Transformation through continued growth, technological and efficiency improvements (decoupling), and global trade for diffusion.	Transformation = shifting from expansion to balance through 1) technological innovation, and 2) an actively fostered cultural change; with the state as catalyzer.	Post-growth transformation financed via short-term green growth. Transformation of social (systemic material inequality + power) and socio-natural relations through expended (economic)democracy	Post-growth society through cultural and material infrastructure supporting sufficiency-based lifestyles, and better integration of diverse dimensions of life (the "good life" concept)	Deliberately fostered roll-back from consumerist culture. "right to sufficiency". Balanced and holistic labor-redistribution and recognition policy, covering all forms of work (paid and unpaid) as the cornerstone for transformative cultural change	Open up the political imagination beyond economicist, developmentalist, and progressive totalitarianism; Post-growth society as an altogether different form of socio-economic organization (e.g. re-localized modern subsistence economies),	Restoration of traditional cultural values (e.g. family) and administration of scarcity. Emphasis on constraint and resignation.	P2P capable of globalizing the dynamics of a small tribe: ICT, network, and 3D printing revolutions (e.g. open source ecology) enable simultaneous localization-globalization through a mode of production based on voluntary free association and horizontality, creating an exponential rise in the creation of user value by

								"prosumers" (productive publics).
Means	- (Growth-financed) green infrastructure - transparent and predictable regulatory framework for private investment (price, tax, and competition policy, including strong IPRs) - technological development allowing for efficiency gains and decoupling - leap-frogging through global trade - Compensatory transfer payments for disadvantaged	- Cultural diversification broadening options - Repolitization ("new social contract) of the cultural model of the West - Scientific and political consensus on climate change providing leverage - technological development, - planned leap-frogging - sustainable agriculture - drastic mobility reduction - Compensatory transfer payments for disadvantaged	- Redistribution via financial transaction tax (Tobin tax) and carbon taxes; - Democratization of the economy incl. energy production. - Work reduction as precondition for cultural shift towards post-materialistic lifestyles with increased participation in politics	- Green stimulus in the short-term + Macro-economic re- redesign away from structural dependence on growth for the medium/ long term - Steered cultural transition: affirmative action in favor of sufficient lifestyles. - Sufficiency provides fast-track to sustainability (no need for complex market and logistic infrastructures) - Meaningful resource and environmental limits on economic activity - Redistribution (material and immaterial: time, power, status, work, etc.) - Internationally: 'contraction & convergence'	- Material redistribution - Enlargeing welfare-state (including UBI) - greening industry - decentralization of key subsistence activities (agriculture & energy) - Re-localization of value chains. - Stete-fostered commoning & convivial practices - Damming privatization Re-politization and democracy: participative, discursively balanced, and cooperative processes Money reform (incl. regional currencies) to work as medium of exchange	- Cultural (e.g. celebrative rather than utilitarian ethos), social and institutional innovations (e.g. time banks, "rights of nature", plurinational states) - Infrastructure for subsistence- and (bio)regional economies - Redistribution of: working time (also work less: 'time wealth'), money, soil - Dismantling of infrastructure of consumer societies: credit advertising, and planned obsolescence, and fostering production of "relational goods" (friendship, neighbourliness, etc.)	- Foster new forms of growth-neutral income generation (e.g. extending but de-intensifying work-life) - Cultural revalorization of care work and family - Replacement of a deficient welfare state by a social state securing minimum living wages - More functions to be taken over by civic engagement and solidarity networks - Reform of the educational system away from market-orientation - Redistribution via financial and ecological taxes	- combination of global open-design communities (i.e. knowledge commoning) and re-localized (self-)production in micro-factories. - economic arrangements minimizing the common cost of shared factors of production (called "economies of scope") - Market-activity carried out by ethical companies tied to the ethical values of the commoners and their support of the respective commons (infrastructure of cooperation) - Reform of the state towards a 'partner-state' (a network of democratically-run for-benefit institutions which protect the common good on a territorial scale) guaranteeing the infrastructure of cooperation at macro-level

Change agents	- UNEP / Fücks: Keynesian state as investor and regulator, orienting private investment; or - OECD: Green markets	cosmopolitan civil society (incl.religious actors), niche-agents'/ networks (a global citizen's movement). testing and advancing innovations	A strong Keynesian welfare state re-balancing societal relations (material and immaterial power and resources)	The state as macro-designer of a resilient economy; and cultural change agent ("orientative politics")	State shaping the conditions for a balanced discursive interaction about the quality and quantity of growth and welfare *(gestaltender Staat)*	Pioneers: prosumers, intentional communities operating from the "margins" of the system, (alternative collective life-forms and collaborative-communal economies, such as Transition Towns)	- enlightened consumers and politicians - entrepreneurial individuals	Peer-to-peer networks of prosumers
Helper	NGOs; ICT-networked and 'informed' citizens	- an empowered "enabling state" with enlarged citizen participation - science, - committed forces in the economy.	Pro-active citizens in a high-intensity democracy (also economic)	- politicians and civil society: young and predominantly urban milieus, - "Intentional communities", - enlightened citizen/ consumer"	Pro-active citizens in a high-intensity democracy (also economic)	The State as instance of institutionalization	- family bonds and solidarity-networks. - Historical evolutionary trend away from materialism	- ethical companies supporting the infrastructure of cooperation - "partner state" sustaining and empowering the P2P society at the macro-level (creating the right environment and support infrastructure)
Obstacles / opponents	- Brown economy and its vested interests (veto players) - advocates of sufficient lifestyles and growth-critics (Fücks)	- Brown economy and its vested interests (veto players) - path-dependencies in the current socio-economic order	- Technocratic global governance - global financial system - state-indebtedness	- "Growth-dilemma" - Dominant structures and values in society (e.g. positional competition) - The economists stalemating debate and their and their "growth-fixes" (green growth, inclusive growth, etc.)	- ''artificial division btw. 'productive' and 'reproductive' activities - Productivist obsession - all forms of imperialism (ecological, gender, geographical)	- "Growth-dilemma" - dogmatic status of growth and development	speculative finance trade unions (with their constant demand for rise in salary), materialistic unidimensionality and commodification of lifeworlds. Scientific communication taxing sufficiency as a burden	- IPR regimes preventing knowledge accessibility; - capitalist capture of value created in mutualized platforms.
Beneficiaries	Urban residents Unemployed getting "green jobs" Poor of the world	Urban residents Unemployed getting "green jobs" Poor of the world	the poor and disfranchised, the future generations	humanity (present and future generations), both at collective and individual level (more happiness, less anxiety)	current (especially women) and future generations	Present and future generations,marginalized socio-economic and cultural groups, particularly in the Global South	Individuals and families of the current and of future generations.	Present and future generations, starting with prosumers and commoners worldwide

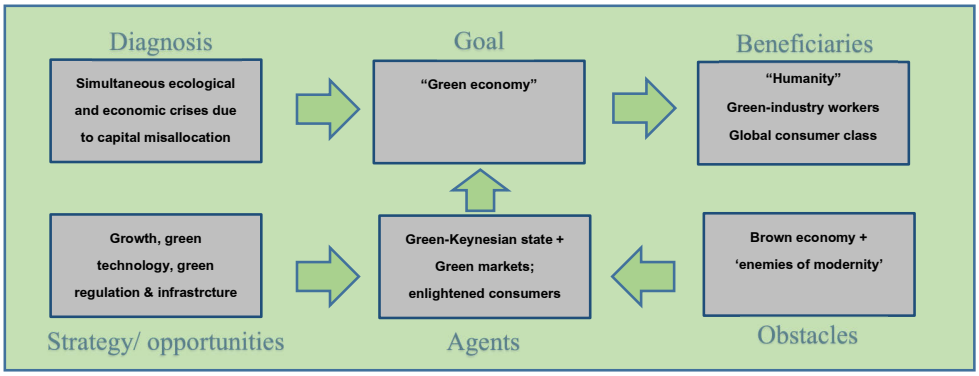
Drawing on the Greimas-analysis summarized in Table 3, the following section seeks to build on the four narrative alignments identified above to reconstruct typified, condensed narrative models at play in the GT debate, which, for shorthand reference and analytical differentiation purposes, I will call *storylines.*[121]

Storylines: typified condensed narratives in the GT debate

This section thus seeks to identify storylines as ideal-typical, condensed narrative structures at play in the GT debate. To add generalizability to these typified narratives beyond the sampled database of GT strategies (Sample 1), their key statements were brought into dialogue, when relevant, with secondary literature, purposefully seeking to reach beyond the data sample used for our analysis.
These narrative ideal-types or storylines also have instrumental value for furthering the discourse analysis: insofar the discursive elements interwoven in these storylines partially overlap or converge, a basis for (potential) discourse coalitions can be established. Furthermore, amongst the discursive elements distinguished in our analysis, narratives/ storylines are the 'most empirical' entity: indeed, narratives are more or less consistent units of meaning which can be retrieved through observation followed by a simple analysis such as the Greimas-model applied here, while phenomenal structures and frames are inherently analytical constructs. Consequently, narratives are also the discursive element which can more easily be correlated with particular discursive agents. Therefore, narratives will be the focal point of the integral analysis of GT discourses (Section 3.4).

[121] This convenience-utilization of the term narrative largely coincides with Maarten Hajer's definition of storylines as a "narratives on social reality through which elements from many different domains are combined and that provide actors with a set of symbolic references that suggest a common understanding" (Hajer, 1995, p. 62), and which serve as a practical and as a political device as the cornerstone for the building of discourse coalitions, and thus as "prime vehicles of change" (p. 63). However, Hajer's conceptualization of storylines relies heavily on his concept of 'discursive affinities' (see final section of frame analysis in this chapter for a detailed conceptualization), which emphasizes extra-cognitive dimensions as the "essential discursive cement that creates communicative networks among actors with different or at best overlapping perceptions and understandings". The storylines in our analytical construct, in turn, are still relatively compact and coherent, logically fitting constructions.

Figure 2. Storyline 1: Green economy (GE): sustainable development as usual



This storyline seeks to distil a common narrative from the GT strategies grouped under the header of 'Alignment 1'. As should be clear to the reader by now, the Green Economy narrative follows the tread of the Brundtland-version of the sustainable development discourse and its theoretical expression: ecological modernization. Hence, the GE storyline should not be regarded as a GT-narrative *stricto sensu*. However, it is empirically part of the GT debate, and remains an important contrasting reference in our analysis.

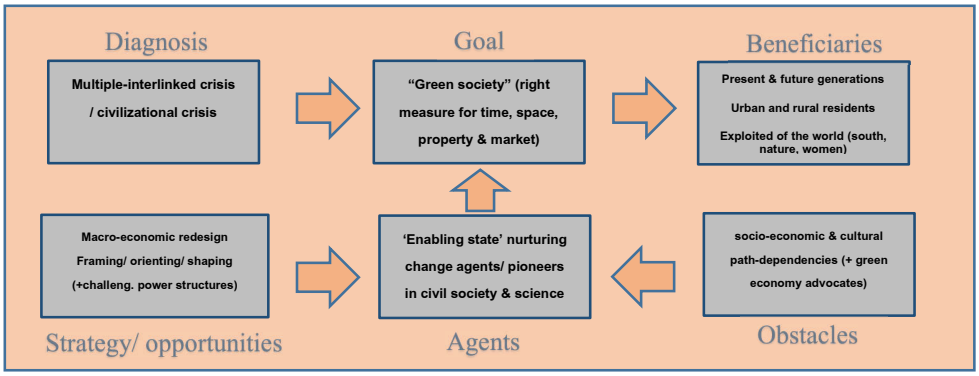
The basic plot goes as follows: Despite the global mainstreaming of the sustainable development discourse since the 1990s, progress towards sustainability has been limited. The reason is a continued failure of capital-allocation, due to both the veto powers of outdated brown-industry players and insufficient political will (or capacity) to set the right regulatory environment, fiscal incentives, and infrastructures. Towards the end of the first decade of the 21st century, the aggravating ecological crisis converged with a global financial and socio-economic crisis. This convergence set the push needed to give the transition to a green economy momentum (DIAGNOSIS). The green economy will usher a new cycle of modernization yielding a triple-win situation for 'the economy', 'society', and the 'environment' (conceived as three autonomous yet interlinked spheres) through green industrial processes, green mobility, green consumer products, green jobs, and green business opportunities for a continued cycle of capital accumulation. Object of the transformation is the transformation of production patterns (marginally also consumption and disposal) yielding the triple-win of economic, social, and environmental gains (GOAL).

The main engine driving change is an (allegedly self-generated) cultural change, as reflected in individual consumer choices. Yet there is no case for an ecological (or cultural) critique of consumerism. The currently prevalent socio-economic system based on economic expansion and material development is not only compatible, but a precondition for a sustainability transformation:

only additional (qualitatively 'smart', 'green', 'sustainable') growth will generate the resources needed for large-scale infrastructure investment required. Further commodification of nature and the creation of adequately functioning pollutants-markets and strong property rights, in general, are promoted to counteract 'tragedy of the commons'-type of situations (STRATEGY). Prospects of steered cultural change are looked at with suspicion, as they could open the door to a 'tyranny of virtue' (i.e. ideological indoctrination) imposed by a paternalistic state. As a consequence, advocates of sufficient lifestyles and growth critics are either produced as non-existent in the Green Economy narrative (Aguilar, Fiuza, Glozman, Grondona, & Pryluka, 2015), or else they appear as anti-heroes, posing a 'dangerous distraction' that could hinder the transformation. The priority of economic growth is unquestionable for southern countries, leading to the current stalemate in multilateral climate negotiations and to the loss of investor confidence (OBSTACLES). The solution offered to the ecological predicament is thus a "flight forward" strategy through regulation and the right incentive-systems (STRATEGY). The main agents of the green transformation are – in addition to the enlightened, sovereign consumer – either the state (Green Keynesianism) or green markets (AGENTS). In the state-driven variant, the state is given a central role as an economic player, in addition to demarcating the economic playing field and correcting market failures. Emphasis placed on large-scale public investments in infrastructure ('Green New Deal'), resulting in a 'green social-market-economy'. In the market-driven variant, emphasis is placed on the diffusion of green technology through global trade, enabling 'leap-frogging' by those lagging behind in the development ladder. Trans-national corporations (TNCs) are thus portrayed as the main players in their role of technological spearheads. The State has a role as essential infrastructure provider and guarantor of transparent and predictable regulatory framework for private investment (price, tax, and competition policy, including strong intellectual property rights (IPRs). The state should also put compensation mechanisms in place (via transfer-payments) for the losers of the transformation.

BENEFICIARIES in the GE-storyline are the working force of the green-industry branches spreading across the whole economy, the substantially enlarged global consumer class increasingly populating the world's cities, and, therethrough, humanity at large. Socio-ecological problems are attributed a "given" character as issued by "mankind", and conflict is neutralized and replaced by 'consensual solutions' (win-win). Core problems (e.g. the globalization of Western modern lifestyles) are in the best case recognized as such, but not treated analytically – i.e. what their dynamics are and how to address them, as done for example by Rilling (2014).

Figure 3. Storyline 2: Green society (GS): emancipatory cultural and ecological critique



The emancipatory narrative of a *Green Society* (GS) synthesizes the shared storyline of the GT-strategies grouped under the header 'alignment 2'. As was shown, this group is much more heterogeneous than that of 'alignment 1'. Despite their internal diversity, however, there is a strong common plot to the narratives in this group, as well: What I called the *Green society* narrative is the melting pot for a fundamental ecological and cultural critique of the expansive, Western-style modernity hailed in the *Green Economy* narrative. Indeed, while the latter sets on hegemonic signifier-signified relationships (i.e. provisionally frozen meaning-attributions in mainstream culture), the former seeks to fight a battle for the appropriation of meaning of positively connoted signifiers, such as modernity, prosperity, freedom, or happiness that we recognized in the analysis of phenomenal structures. In addition to this cultural battle, the *Green Society* narratives also tell a story about the technical incompatibility of a growth-dependent economy with ecological sustainability[122] (Asara et al., 2015). Common to most of the GS-narratives is the critique of economic growth as inherently incompatible with a finite planet (de-growth), or else of the growth-imperative, i.e. the structural dependence of modern societies on economic growth (a-growth). Some would approve of a short-term continuation of growth as a precondition to transform the energy-matrix and drastically rise resource-productivity (Institut Solidarische Moderne, 2011). Yet unlike the *conservative contraction* narrative (storyline 3), in the *Green Society,* the growth-critique is coupled with socially progressive critiques, such as the separation between the spheres of 'production' and 'reproduction' (Biesecker et al., 2012), the critique of development as ideology (known in academic literature as *postdevelopment* – cf. Introductory chapter), or the critique of capitalism (Brand, 2016a; Institut Solidarische Moderne, 2011).

[122] For a detailed discussion of the growth-critique, see the phenomenal structure analysis of the axial theme GDP growth in this chapter.

The crisis is thus understood here as much broader in scope than is the case in the *Green Economy* narrative, comprising Western-style modern societies as a systemic whole, with an emphasis on their ecologically and socially unsustainable (and exploitative) production-consumption matrix. The emphases change regarding the exploited subject – nature, the global south, reproductive (mainly female) work – yet they are acknowledged to have a common root in the capitalist accumulation imperative. Therefore, the problem is much more than an implementation-deficit of the Brundtland-formula: the problem lies with the very pillar of Western-style modern societies as currently organized. Hence, the 'Great transformation' implies not only the economic system, but also social organization and cultural patterns. (Euro-Atlantic) modernity must be re-conceptualized, and future-optimism is a "militant optimism" (Bloch, 1995) actively fostering such redefinition (DIAGNOSIS). Liberal cultural values and institutions are not outrightly rejected, but rather subject to a profound re-signification effort: 'negative' freedom (*from* external constraints) needs to be de-emphasized in favor of 'positive' freedom (*for* the achievement of individual and collective purposes) (Gould, 2008); autonomy needs to be re-conceptualized from *independence* towards *interdependence* (MacIntyre, 2001); the concept of rationality needs to be extended from that of a Cartesian instrumental rationality as ultimate benchmark to that of a complex, plural rationality (Leff, 2004a; Santos, 2008) – including the democratization of science (Beck, 1992; Funtowicz & Ravetz, 1993; Schneidewind, 2013b; WBGU, 2011). By way of synthesis, perhaps, one could say that *universality* needs to be re-conceptualized towards a non-totalizing, kaleidoscopic *pluriverse* (Escobar, 2011; Rehbein, 2013).

The vision of a Green Society is that of a resilient socio-economic order providing capabilities for individual and collective human flourishing within ecological limits, a "solidarity-based modernity" (Institut Solidarische Moderne, 2011) with a post-materialistic view of prosperity (GOAL). Emphasis is placed on qualitatively different dimensions of a good life and emancipatory character of sufficiency-based lifestyles as a collective endeavor. The lifestyle-question is not limited to more ecological sustainability, but to a better integration of diverse dimensions of life (the "good life" concept). The goal of a green society is thus one of re-balancing the excesses and deconstructing the biases implicit in an ideal of modernity which follows a linear compulsion towards unlimited expansion: modernity is also about reflexively and autonomously choosing – as socially embedded individuals – the right societal path towards a good life for all, which can be summarized as 'the right measure for time, space, property, and the market', which, following Wolfgang Sachs (1994), would translate into "less speed, less distance, less stuff, and less market", but, at the same time, more freedom, more

relationality and conviviality, more time-prosperity[123] *(Zeitwohlstand)*, more individual and communal autonomy and control over one's own life. In short: in the *Green Society*, the good life amounts to "living better while consuming less and working less" (Latouche, 2009, p. 9), allowing for more resonance experiences (H. Rosa, 2016b) or a certain degree of "re-enchantment of the world" as a precondition for a 'Great Transformation' (Latouche, 2009, p. 85).

Achieving this vision implies balancing current forces of acceleration, globalization, consumerism, and commodification/marketization through deliberate investment and promotion of cultural and material infrastructure towards sufficiency (STRATGY & OPPORTUNITIES). Such balancing can be achieved only through a holistic policy-outlook. Schneidewind & Zahrnt (2014) punctuated this holistic transformation as a combination of *framing, orienting, shaping*, and *enabling*: *framing* deals with "changes to the institutional framework around our economic activity, from a new measure for prosperity and changes to ownership and competition regimes to policies for greater social justice" (p. 111). Ultimately, what is required is a macro-economic re-design away from the structural dependence on economic growth to merely sustain functional societies, with fundamental restructuration especially of the realms of labor and finance. Meaningful resource and environmental limits on economic activity are also indispensable (Jackson, 2009a). O*rienting* refers to the realm of symbolic politics, which needs to foster less speed, less distance, less property and less market. To this goal, time policies (working-time, leisure time, durability of products, etc.) are seen as key. The other two are very pragmatic: *shaping* means implementing measures needed to bring about such a re-orientation in specific policy fields, such as housing, mobility and food (taking advantage of existing structures and policies); and *enabling* implies building capacity and resources for sufficiency through health, consumer, work or education policy, areas which today are still dominated by the dogma of economic growth, and so they are often focused on the creation of jobs and of more consumption. In the WBGU's (2011, p. 9) vision, fundamental changes can be achieved by following a 'jaw strategy' which combines a "polycentric policy-strategy" – i.e. numerous convergent small, 'easy' measures leading through emergence to a 'social tipping point' decreasing social resistance to the transformation (which differs from

[123] Under the heading of time-prosperity *(Zeitwohlstand)*, the use of time in market societies is problematized as a form of alienation of individual life, as in Arendt's and Latouche's aforementioned opposition between 'free' and 'liberated' time, whereby the latter is that time which is spent in non-marketized activities (Latouche, 2009, p. 85)

incremental, short-term crisis management) –, and a "focused strategy": few, high-impact, 'difficult' measures with wide-reaching, cross-cutting effect.

The view regarding the AGENTS of the transformation correlates with the varying conceptualization of the perceived capacity for effective implementation of the regulatory authority. *Post-developmentalists* and the feminist *reproductive critique* (cf. Table 3) see the state as an expression of the prevailing balance of societal forces, and thus its regulatory independence and capacity for transformative change as inherently compromised. Yet all sub-narratives stress the potential role of government in actively and systematically fostering cultural change, thus creating conditions of possibility for effective intervention, in the first place. But is not only the agency of an empowered "enabling state" or *gestaltender Staat* (Biesecker & Hofmeister, 2014, p. 154; Biesecker et al., 2012, p. 35) as macro-designer of a resilient economy and a cultural change agent that is relevant to the transformation: emphasis is varyingly placed also on a cosmopolitan civil society (including religious actors), 'change agents' in niches (e.g. intentional communities) and their networks to test and advance innovations (WBGU, 2011, p. 6), a transformative science (Schneidewind, 2013b; WBGU, 2011, p. 22), committed forces in the economy (WBGU, 2011, p. 8), enlightened citizens – usually young and predominantly urban milieus (Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014, p. 138) –, seeking to combine own lifestyle change with engagement in fostering structural socio-political change.

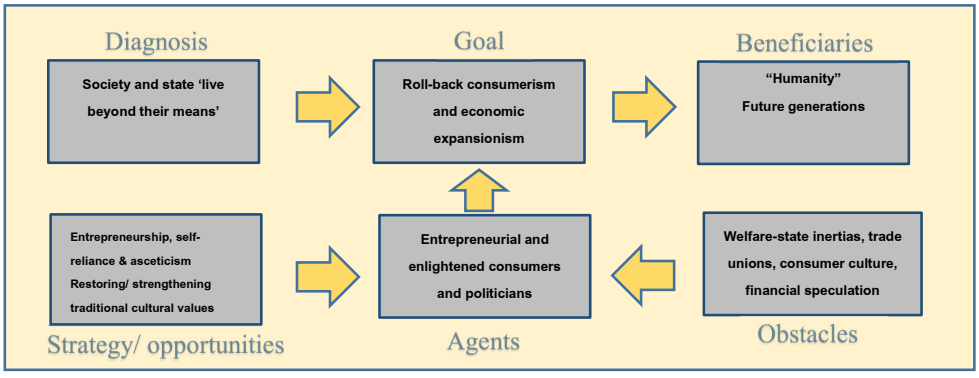
OBSTACLES to the transformation are rather portrayed here as systemic in nature: be it the logic of the capitalist system, the structural-technical path-dependencies (e.g. transport or energy-production infrastructure, but also state-indebtedness and structurally entrenched power relations in society) and cultural inertias – e.g. the 'growth mentality' (Welzer, 2011), the cult of material success, the "iron cage of consumerism" (in particular positional competition, worsened by inequality) (Jackson, 2009a, p. 39), the artificial division between so-called 'productive' and 'reproductive' activities, and, more generally, the ethos of *usefulness* (Aguilar et al., 2015) – that block transformative progress. The growth-dependent economic system poses a particularly wicked challenge combining the two types of lock-in: the structural-technical "growth-dilemma" (Jackson, 2009a, pp. 7, 11) – i.e. growth is ecologically unsustainable, but the absence of growth leads to instability – is aggravated by the fact that it goes unrecognized in mainstream policy or in public debate (p. 102) due to the "dogmatic status of growth" (p. 10). In addition to these structural causes, of course, is the taken-for-granted resistance of veto-players protecting their vested interests in the status quo, and certain discursive hegemonies (particularly, the discourse of economics), which stalemates debate and innovation (Schneidewind &

Zahrnt, 2014, pp. 150–151) and keeps delaying the confrontation of the inevitable through "growth-fix"-discourses (green growth, inclusive growth, etc. (p. 49)

BENEFICIARIES in this narrative are more concretely identified as in the Green Economy: material sufficiency, more happiness, and less anxiety await both present and future generations, including marginalized socio-economic and cultural groups (women, indigenous people, etc.), particularly in the Global South.

Within the broader narrative outlined above, and following the classifications in Table 3 (by colors), three sub-groupings are worth distinguishing: the first stresses consumption and production patterns towards dematerialized value and sufficiency (under the header *new social contract*), the second adds a critique of the inbuilt unsustainable character of an economy that is structurally dependent on exponential growth *(*header *sufficiency-oriented liberalism)*, and the third stresses the problematic character of power dynamics and structural inequalities in society and articulates an open critique of capitalism (headers *solidarity-based modernity, (re)productivism*, *post-development*). While the narratives of a *solidarity-based modernity* and *(re)productivism* do not explicitly stress the growth-dependence of the economy as the ultimate source of the multiple crisis, as *sufficiency-oriented liberalism* and *post-development* do, their argumentative structure is certainly compatible with the growth critique. Despite the commonalities outlined above, the *new social contract*, which advocates cultural change, sufficiency, and democratization but remains silent about growth and the need to re-localize economic value chains, while also favoring a more sophisticated proprietary regime and leaving the dominance of the market logic unquestioned (W. Sachs, 2013) instead of a re-*commonalization* and de-commodification of socio-economic life, is the clear outlier of the 'alignment 2' group, and should be understood as a midway between the green economy and green society storylines.

Figure 4. Storyline 3: Moral-conservative economic contraction (CC)



The plot of the *Conservative Contraction* storyline (CC) shares a similar point of departure to the *Green Society*: both combine a fundamental ecological critique and a radical cultural critique targeting the growth-obsession of a consumption-driven global economy. Their respective prescriptions, however, considerably differ from each other. The framing also changes: The conservative narrative sees modernity as such as having crashed against its own barriers, as both citizens and the state "live beyond their means". The expansionist and materialist obsession destroying nature and the social bond.The illusory character of the artificial "paradise of abundance" that the lifestyle of the global consumer class lives in was revealed by the latest economic crisis, yet this remains unacknowledged in mainstream social and political discourse (DIAGNOSIS).

The society envisioned here (GOAL) is a frugal and resigned one, resting on the moral argument of sacrifice: we are living beyond our means, and it's time to pay the bill. The end of growth is not framed as a political goal, but as a fact to which societies need to adapt (Miegel, 2010, p. 163). Given this context, the object of politics is a fair administration of scarcity.

The OBSTACLES toward this frugal society are multiple: path-dependencies in certain economic sectors, institutions and structures, in particular those of the Welfare state – the 'growth trap' already invoked in the GS-storyline –, debt, moral corruption. At the cultural level, materialism and the commodification of lifeworlds (Miegel, 2010, pp. 181, 238). Beyond a GDP per capita of US$ 20.000, subjective wellbeing does not increase in advanced countries (Miegel, 2010, p. 32 for Schneidewind & Zahrnt, it is after 10.000 Euros/ p. 35); after this threshold, material possessions (and the system which produces them) do not free people, but rather enslave them, as can be observed in the case of early industrialized countries today (p. 158).

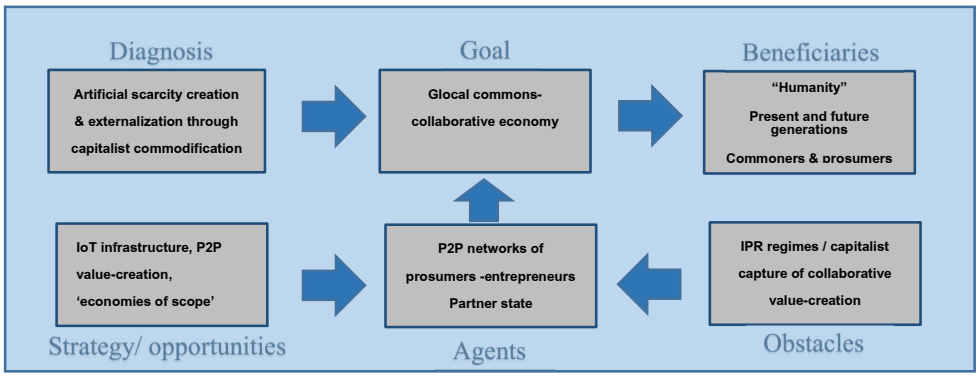
Yet a historical window of OPPORTUNITY opens up as materialism progressively loses stance as a source of meaning for life (p. 166). Welfare and growth are decoupled, which means that the only remaining anchor for the growth imperative is jobs (pp. 33-34). But continued growth is a delusional promise: even today's growth is precarious and artificial in character (p. 181; coinciding with Jackson, p. 6). Hence, growth fails even in its own terms, in providing for social stability.

The conservative STRATEGY for society to cope with the end of growth is multiplying and scaling-up the promotion of cultural and material initiatives fostering a roll-back of materialism. The focus should be set on "unproductive" policy-areas, pointing at the restoration of traditional values such as friendship, respect, and solidarity. In addition, a radical contraction of the state apparatus and of the economy is required: Both neoliberal deregulation and progressive redistribution fuel the growth-dependency. What is needed for society to cope with this downscaling are new forms of income

generation that are independent from growth: independent, entrepreneurial work paving the way for self-reliance. Retirement age should be raised to alleviate fiscal pressure. The internalization of ecological damages of capital-intensive production through taxation should make labor regain competitiveness vis-à-vis automatization (Miegel, 2010, p. 181 ff.). More work will be required, as material compensation and state-benefits will decrease (Miegel, 2010, p. 192 ff.). Solidarity-networks and a solidarity-culture will surface as a reaction to the retreat of the welfare state (Miegel, 2010, pp. 205–208), in the form of e.g. enlarged families. This will, in turn, raise birth rates, helping to keep immigration at bay.

The privileged AGENTS in realizing the conservative transformation are enlightened persons in politics, citizens and consumers that understand the 'adaptation imperative'. Politicians will lead the political framework-reforms, but the key agency is that of entrepreneurial, self-procuring individuals showcasing that the dependence on state-provision is reminiscent from other times that in an overweighed world just puts an extra-burden on society and nature.

Figure 5. Storyline 4: Glocal commons-collaborative economy or P2P society (P2P)



The P2P-storyline sees the multiple crisis as the logical result of a continued process of artificial scarcity-creation through the historical processes of enclosure of the commons and ever-expanding commodification of all spheres of life, and of the corresponding process of externalization. Both are rooted in the logic of privatization and capital accumulation: private gain can only be continuedly maximized at the expense of others and of nature (DIAGNOSIS).

The vision opposed here to this dystopia (GOAL) is a commons-based collaborative economy, which – as a result of historical windows of opportunity opened by socio-technical co-evolution – has led to the emergence of a new mode of production, one that is capable of globalizing the communitarian dynamics of traditional tribal forms: peer-to-peer (P2P) (Bauwens, 2012b, p. 3). This new mode of production is defined by an ethos of free association and horizontality: peer production is currently

most visible in the free software industry, and incipiently in the open hardware realm (e.g. open source ecology). Today, this mode of production exists only in a proto-version, which is entirely interdependent with the system of capital. But the social reproduction of commons and the commoners could potentially grow independent from the accumulation cycle of capital, and generate its own cycle of value creation. For P2P becoming anti-systemic (de facto "eclipsing" capitalism – to borrow Jeremy Rifkin's expression), it would need to create an exponential rise in the creation of user value by productive publics, or "prosumers" (or "produsers"), which would trump the logic of scarcity-creation and expansion on which capital accumulation rests.

The historical window of opportunity (STRATEGY/ OPPORTUNITY) for this is provided by technological development: A quantum-leap in late-modern development trajectory is to be expected (in fact, is already underway) due to a fundamental change of the communications-energy matrix (Rifkin, 2014): in the first and second industrial revolutions, energy and communications required centralization and vertical integration to rise labor productivity and resource-efficiency ('economies of scale'). The upcoming third revolution infrastructure is the so-called Internet of Things (IoT): an integrated network of decentralized communications, energy production, and micro-factories using 3D-printing technology. This development creates the structural conditions of possibility for the materialization of M.K. Gahndi's vision of *swaraj*. Given the environmental impact and rising costs of global economies of scale, alternative economic arrangements minimizing the common cost of shared factors of production (called "economies of scope" or "lateral scale") make increasing economic, social and environmental sense.

What is hitherto standing in the way toward a P2P society (OBSTACLES) is the institutionalized privatization of knowledge by capitalist interests (IPR regimes) and the capitalist capture of social collaborative value-creation through marketization (e.g. the so-called "sharing-economy": car-sharing companies, AirBNB, etc.). But since communications/energy matrixes determine the way power is organized and distributed in any civilization (Rifkin, 2014, p. 106), political confrontation is secondary to the co-evolutionist force of socio-technical systems.

AGENTS, in this storyline, are seen as emerging outcomes of the co- evolutionary dynamics of social and technical development. This does not amount to saying that agency has no role to play in realizing the co-evolutionary process: prosumers forming both global open-design communities (i.e. knowledge commoners) and re-localized micro-factories form, of course, the cornerstone of a P2P society. Yet market value would still be needed to help sustain the infrastructure of cooperation upon which the

creation of the commons rests (servers, micro-factories, etc.). This would be derived from the activity of ethical companies whose existence is tied to their alignment with the ethical values of the commoners and their support of the respective commons. At the macro-level, the P2P society is sustained and empowered by a Partner state (orig. theorized by Cosma Orsi), i.e. a state form that enables and empowers the social creation of value by its citizens (as opposed to private or state-public provision), creating the right environment and support infrastructure so that citizens can peer produce value from which the whole society benefits (Bauwens, 2012a, p. 6) (BENEFICIARIES).

What can we learn from the narrative analysis?

This concluding part of section 3.3.2 seeks to revisit and assess the findings of phenomenal structure analysis from the perspective of their narrative embeddedness, including how the axial themes of the GT debate are bound into the distinct ideal-typical storylines.

First, regarding the DIAGNOSIS, different depth-layers in the understanding of the 'multiple crisis' can be narratively assigned to our typified storylines. The background question is: How systemic is the crisis? Is it a crisis of the fossil-based economy? Is it a crisis of the hyper-financialized, neoliberal mode of capitalist regulation? (*Green economy* storyline). Is it a crisis of capitalism as such (or of industrialism)? (*P2P society* and part of the *Green Society* narratives: 'solidarity-based modernity' and 'sufficiency-oriented liberalism'). Is it a crisis of a certain understanding of modernity (i.e. a civilizational crisis)? (in a broad structural sense: *Green Society* 'post-developmental' and 'reproductivist' narratives; in a moral-cultural sense: *Conservative Contraction*).

With respect to the GOAL or VISION for a GT, most narratives in the GT debate do problematize the dominant logic of profit-making, capital accumulation, and economic expansion, with the exception of the *Green Economy* storyline (and, to an extent, the GS-sub-narrative of the 'new social contract'). In so doing, positively connoted signifiers in the dominant culture (modernity, prosperity, freedom) are disputed, especially between the GE and GS narratives, as are definitions of success and happiness. The precise content of these disputes will be analyzed in detail in section 3.3.3 on frames, but a straightforward distinction can be made between the dominant expansionist, materialist, business-as-usual definitions of these concepts in the Green Economy and the defensive arguments of the Green Society narratives, seeking to expand the scope of meaning to re-claim these positive

values, also if accorded to alternative forms of economic and social organization based on sufficiency, social rather than economic value creation, and 'ecological caps'.

Regarding the STRATEGIES and OPPORTUNITIES, I will refer to the narrative embeddedness of three issues raised as an outcome of phenomenal structure analysis: 1) the narrative ascription of meaning and narrative articulation of axial themes; 2) the issue of disputed technical matters (particularly the *decoupling hypothesis*)[124], and 3) the historical window of opportunity for a transformation opened-up by alterations in the material foundation of societies.

First, regarding the narrative meaning-attributions, the watershed-themes[125] structuring the debate – i.e. GDP growth, sufficiency, and re-localization – can now be narratively matched with our ideal-typical storylines: The *Green Economy* on one side, all *GS-narratives* and *Conservative Contraction* on the opposite one, whereby both sides argue not only in opposition to each other, but also on different grounds. The discursive battlefield spans across from the technical field (with the *decoupling hypothesis* as key question[126]) to the cultural field (i.e. to the question about the 'growth mentality', the 'growth dogma', or 'technological messianism'). The sufficiency-issue, in turn, is firmly anchored in the cultural realm in the conservative narrative (CC), while in GS its political and material implications are foregrounded. Sufficiency usually goes hand in hand with a re-localization of economic value-chains (first and foremost of subsistence-critical activities). GS stresses also the re-localization of political as well as of cultural life, allowing for greater community-resilience, a social re-embeddedness of the economy, reduction of trade-related pollution, and the repair of the social bond through communitarian solidarity. Any significant re-localization (in particular of economic value-chains) is, in turn, explicitly ridiculed by the evolutionist globalization discourse of the Green Economy.

A special provision should be made for the P2P storyline, which, despite aligning with the epochal diagnosis of GS and CC and, and rejecting consumerism and economic expansionism, as the latter do, envisions a hybrid future: a "post-scarcity world" in which P2P production will do away with growth pressures and consumerism. This is, however, not the same prescription of a (state-guaranteed)

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[124] Another technical issue with a high toll on the feasibility of a 'Great Transformation' that is discussed in the literature (e.g. by Tim Jackson) is the dysfunctionality of the current global system of money supply (so-called *'fiat-money'*) and the need to subject it to public control. While I acknowledge the enormous importance of such issue, it will not be further specifically discussed here, as this was not found to be one of the axial themes dominating the GT-debate (as, in my view, it should), but it will be implicitly included through the generic category of 'disputed assessments around technical matters'.

[125] See point "what can we learn from phenomenal structure analysis" in section 3.1

[126] See footnote 108 on rebound-effects in Section 3.3.1

protected space for the flourishing of social creativity, political engagement, and care promoted by the GS; though the end result would be much alike. Hence, *P2P* narratively 'circumvents' the difficult challenge proposed by GS, but gets to the same place. Confrontation, however, cannot be entirely avoided: strong property rights (in particular, IPRs, where the bulk of the profit of capital comes from in the global economy) amount to a foundational stone for the *Green economy* storyline, and to a fundamental obstacle for *P2P society*. The axial theme *Commons* thus emerges as another clear-cut watershed, as soon as the 'sharing economy' is framed as bypassing the principles of private property (here, particularly, intellectual property) and profit-maximizing markets.

As for the remaining axial themes, which we characterized as potential *floating signifiers*, can also be ascribed to the typified storylines with particular meanings. *Cultural change* is not a central concern for the Green Economy, although seemingly naturalist post-materialist shifts in consumer preferences and 'environment-friendly' social practices (recycling, riding a bicycle, etc.) are welcome and portrayed as a sign of improved 'environmental consciousness'. Efforts are directed at closing the 'value-action gap' that prevents such progress in environmental consciousness translate into corresponding behaviors by the mainstream populations. CC and GS, in turn, see cultural change as a cornerstone of transformative social change. Yet while the former relies on moral appeals for frugality in the name of ecological realism, the latter sees the creation of an infrastructure for cultural change as precondition for culturally embedded individuals to be in position of producing and reproducing ecologically and socially sustainable practices. Underlying these differing prescriptions are equally differing theories of the social and of social change (Shove, 2010a): whereas GE and CC emphasize that 'we make society', GS insists on the complement that 'society makes us'. These differing understandings of the social explain the competing claims of sufficiency as a political project versus sufficiency as an individual lifestyle-choice. In P2P, the socio-technical co-evolutionary dialectic is the constitutive narrative logic: the emergence of a glocal collaborative commons-based economy and the "eclipse of capitalism" will not be the result of a political revolution, but rather of the (strategically supported) social metabolization of technological developments.

Competing theories of the social also partially explain the differing accounts of the axial theme *democratization*: while enlarged citizen participation together with increased accountability and transparency of elected political representatives and their administrative officers define the agenda of the GE, GS stresses the importance of power structures: the state is not a neutral actors who can be safely assumed to work in favor of the 'common good', but rather reflects the social balance of power. Therefore, the state's legitimation-drive towards democratization of public life should be geared

towards unraveling power entrenchments through democratizing not only the state, but fundamentally also society, the economy, and culture. A fundamental re-politization of life is thus advocated, which, by implication, also means involving a wider range of 'transformation-agents' beyond the usual scope of politicians, bureaucrats, and large business and NGOs. CC sees not the danger of the state being co-opted by dominant social and economic powers, but rather degenerated through the institutional stiffening of historically sedimented social demands that are now outdated (such as an 'early' retirement age which did not further evolve to match growing life expectancy). Democratization would further reinforce the perpetuation of unjustified public welfare benefits. But also in the GS camp there are skeptics of democratization: While strongly sympathetic of cultural diversification making room for alternatives and a plural economy, there is a strand within the GS which sees a strongly established correspondence between material prosperity and the political imaginary of emancipation. For this reason, straightforward promotion of citizen involvement is unlikely to yield 'ecologically right' outcomes, which would necessarily involve taming the materialistic *hubris* (Blühdorn, 2007; Jackson, 2009a; Paech, 2012). For its part, P2P circumvents most these issues: the collaborative commons-economy balances individualist entrepreneurial and meritocratic values ruling P2P networks with open-access, socially distributed (i.e. democratized) benefits.

Similarly, *redistribution* is problematized diversely along the fault-line of the abovementioned theories of social change: In P2P redistribution is an unmediated byproduct of the shift in production systems, and thus not problematized as a transformation-driver. For the GE and CC, redistribution as such is seen as undesirable, politically impossible, or even unnatural, although compensatory transfer-payments to secure social support for unpopular policy measures or disruptive business practices are supported. For the GS, redistribution is not only an issue of justice, but a key lever for the transformation, insofar greater material equality would remove social and psychological pressures underpinning positional consumption.

An important feature of the GT-debate, as we had concluded from the analysis of phenomenal structures, is the meaning-disputes around cross-cutting, positively connoted signifiers such as modernity, prosperity, freedom, happiness, success, the good life. These reference frames and their narrative embeddedness will be dealt with in detail in section 3.3.3 on Frame analysis

With regard to windows of OPPORTUNITY, phenomenal structure analysis had revealed a common assumption of potentially disruptive socio-technical developments (big data, AI, IoT technologies and their diverse forms of social metabolization) that would lead to a radical re-structuration (and likely a shrinking) of the labor market, in particular, and of the social and economic significance of waged-

labor, in general. We can now distinguish narrative articulations from this common assumption: *Green Economy* representatives cling to established cultural and economic material and meaning-structures. Structural unemployment resulting from the fading brown-economy is assumed to be (over)compensated by brand new 'green jobs'. Even if not explicitly problematized in our samples of the GE-narrative, the projected loss of jobs due to the automation wave of 'Industry 4.0', potentially creates room for coalescence around forms of securing means of subsistence with visions and proposals from other narratives. *Universal Basic Income,* for example, is a policy-idea enjoying widespread and increasing acceptance by both advocates of fiscal austerity, who see in this the opportunity for substantially shrinking the bureaucracy of the welfare state, and by progressives, who emphasize the transformative ripple-effects of a basic subsistence-insurance in almost all areas of social life (waged-labor, reproductive activities, political activation, etc.). Similarly, work reduction is generally favored by all GS-narratives. Bounded cooperation-space exists also with CC: Indeed, even if CC seeks to extend rather than reduce working-life to disburden the state from retirement pension-payments, it favors flexible and less intensive working-time policy to allow for care and self-development. Of course, CC would not rely on state-mediated social solidarity to secure subsistence, but rather on clan-solidarity around enlarged families. P2P again deviates the most from the narrative pattern, as the social and economic conception and significance of work is fundamentally altered correspondingly with the shift in modes of production. Solidarity-networks here are organic to P2P-design communities and micro-factories.

From the analysis of AGENTS of change, three distinct (usually also framed as competing) patterns for the governance of the transformation are discernable alongside narrative fault-lines: GE favors a techno-managerial view (top-down), where identifiable transformation-agents are the state as investor and regulator, the markets as resource-allocation mechanism, and enlightened consumers creating market-signals for investors to make ecological and socially right choices. Insofar the main driver of the transformation is moral, the conservative narrative (CC) personalizes transformative agency even more, be it in the political, the economic, or the social sphere. The GS-narratives oppose to these a re-politicized 'design of the future': dominant market-oriented technological development and management, as well as cultural preferences, embody the very power relations that need to be challenged if political decisions are to pursue the common good of present and future generations. The P2P-storyline sees steering as decentralized and collective, but also as largely a-political, insofar bounded (if not determined) by the co-evolution of socio-technical systems.

OPPONENTS or OBSTACLES are narratively constructed either as contingent and personalized – e.g. vested interests (all narratives), specific social groups (e.g. for GE, the 'enemies of modernity'; for GS, 'the (neoclassical) economists'; for CC, the trade unions, etc.) –, or as structural: socio-economic and cultural path- dependencies, such as consumerism (GS and CC), welfare state structures (CC), intellectual property regimes and the logic of capital accumulation (P2P and GS). Worth noticing, all of our typified storylines acknowledge structural lock-ins in some of the institutions and processes of society, except for the GE, who sees the veto-power of brown economy representatives as by and large the only obstacle in the way to a sustainable future. Indeed, the GE sees the only one of the four storylines that sees the future as an extrapolation of the present in terms of the basic structures of society.

Lastly, regarding the BENEFICIARIES, a dual categorization is also possible: under the sociologically empty signifier of 'humanity', deployed in both the GE and CC narratives, responsibilities are blanketed (CC) and benefits are assumed to automatically 'trickle down' (GE): what is good for (green) industry and for the global consumer class is good for humanity. In the GS-storyline, in turn, responsibilities are highlighted and framed in structural terms. A concept that would fairly dispute the 'humanist' approach of CC and GE is the already mentioned "imperial ways of life" *(imperiale Lebensweise)* (Brand & Wissen, 2011, 2017), which highlights the inherent non-generalizability of modern Western lifestyles, as their sustainment is a function of the exploitation of man and nature. GS thus speaks to particularized beneficiaries: marginalized social groups in the global south, women, care-workers, precarious waged-workers, the anxious and footloose liberal professional, the youth whose future has been severely compromised, etc; while GE largely conflates the global consumer class with humanity, and recognizes only an inter-generational tension. The conflict setting can be thus framed as one pitting the global middle classes against the global marginalized (W. Sachs, 2014).

3.3.3. Frame analysis: the implicit world(s) in GT discourses

In the methodological scheme of the Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourses (SKAD), the analysis of socio-cognitive *frames*, also called interpretative templates or patterns (*Deutungsmuster*) constitutes a third complementary level of access to the study of the content-related structuring of discourses, together with the analysis of phenomenal and narrative structures.

In Chapter 1 we defined *frames* as interpretative templates available in social knowledge-stocks that can be drawn upon (therethrough being actualized) in collective or individual meaning-making

processes (Keller, 2011, p. 108). The analysis of frames is a way of tapping into the world of socio-cognitive presuppositions, i.e. the cognitive rules governing social interaction, what we referred to in Chapter 1 as the "symbolic order".

While narratives belong to the normative world, frames inhabit the pre-normative world, the world of socio-cognitive presuppositions. In other words, a frame is the ideational background reference-context of a given topic, or the more or less explicit *overarching theme* (with its corresponding, provisionally fixed meaning-structure, which varies with spatial-temporal coordinates) in reference to which a particular topic is being discussed. The overarching theme in a discussion is the category around everything else can be meaningfully ordered: it is the reference-phenomenon of a discourse, i.e. what the discourse *is about*. Insofar, frames are the most significant unit of meaning transported by a discourse (Keller, 2011; Keller et al., forthcoming, p. 19).

As we saw in Chapter 1, framing can also be understood as a *strategic* activity, i.e. the deliberate use of argumentative tools to influence meaning-making activities in line with certain pre-constituted purposes. The aim of frame analysis here (and in SKAD, which draws on the German traditions of *Deutungsmusteranalyse*), however, is rather to retrieve socially typified (i.e. conventionalized) meaning of the overarching theme of a discourse, which allows for understanding about the way in which the world is symbolically ordered in a given discourse – i.e. the structure of cultural assumptions operating in the background –, regardless of the strategic intentions of discursive agents.

In the case-study at hand, the more explicit frames appear evident as derived directly from the analysis of narratives – e.g. the alternative ways of framing 'steering modes', as a political or rather a techno-managerial business, can be directly derived from the diverse storylines. But there are deeper, more implicit interpretative schemes that cannot be immediately retrieved from the narrative accounts. Both are necessary for an adequate understanding of the alternative discursive orderings of the world at play in the GT debate.

In the absence of 'objective' methods for deriving frames from the data, frame analysis is the most artisanal and interpretative phase of the discourse analysis. To constrain the researcher's subjectivity and attain 'social objectivization' of the frame-reconstruction process (Keller 2011, p. 109), this task was carried out in a small, *ad hoc* group of 3 previously instructed persons with "empirical literacy" in the GT debate.

The method followed to perform the frame-analysis started with a sequential analysis of GT-strategy summaries, crossing them with the results of the analysis of phenomenal of structures for each axial theme, to iteratively come up with the frames that best accounted for the interpretation of each

strategy. A purposeful device to derive frames was looking for the main, overarching cleavages explicit or implicit in and across said strategies. All emerging hypotheses were discussed by checking them against the coded data. The best suited interpretation prevailed (often subsuming some of the interpretations discarded in the process). The final systematization of these collectively filtered interpretations was a solo work of the author of this dissertation.

Outcome of the group-process

The group-work produced insights about the frames implicit in the GT discourses which can be grouped in three main categories:

A. Understanding of 'modernity'

This first category synthesizes alternative conceptions of the world in terms of ontological, anthropological, and epistemological assumptions; as well as moral and political-philosophical assumptions and normative preferences, all of which were subsumed as descriptors under a 'meta-frame' in the GT-debate: it is ultimately about the meaning of "*modernity*" and what the transformation would imply for it. Modernity is not conceived of, in this regard, as a historical period, but as a particular pattern of social organization dominant in contemporary societies. Three basic variants were identified - *expansive modernity*, *balancing/ reductive modernity*, and *plural modernities* - to which implicit or explicit reference has already been made in previous steps of analysis. By implication, the widespread idea of 'modernity' as a synonym of contemporaneity, Occidentalism, or a determined set of institutional or philosophical features (democracy, market economies, science as superior form of knowledge, etc.) is challenged in the GT debate, echoing longstanding academic debates on modernity[127]. This should not come as a surprise: indeed, a rigid and static understanding of

[127] Indeed, our categorization here follows established archetypes in the sociological literature. While the expansive modernity follows the descriptive patterns of the classical theories of modernity (as reflected, for example, in Rostow's stages of economic development), the balancing/reductive modernity corresponds to U. Beck's 'reflexive modernity', which sets to reformulate the classical model in the face of self-engendered systemic or civilizational risks (Beck, 1992), also represented in the GT debate by Herald Welzer, who advocates a "reductive modernity" as opposite to the dominant understanding of modernity as "expansive" (Welzer & Sommer, 2014). Yet from the perspective of the pluralist theories of modernity, which, in the historical framework of contemporary globalization, envisage diverse possible global "trajectories of modernity", both the expansive and the reductive/ balancing models of modernity can be framed as deriving from the same 'Eurocentric matrix' of thought, which has long colonized our understanding of modernity. "Eurocentrism" is a neologism that refers to assumptions that identify the European historical course and social structural patterns as a universal model (Wallerstein, 2004). Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2008, 2009) has typified

modernity would be at odds with the complex and dynamic evolution of socio-cultural systems. Yet those critically questioning dominant understandings of (an expansive) modernity will typically be labeled 'anti-moderns' (e.g. Fücks, 2013, p. 36 referring to growth-critics).

Here, the three understandings of modernity will be characterized as they come about across the GT debate, through the specification of the descriptive categories identified through the collective-interpretative work, which drew on the analysis of phenomenal structures in the GT debate. This is synthesized in Table 4 below.

'Modernity' is variably framed either in *naturalistic, expansive* terms (a frame shared by conservatives advocating a 'roll-back' of modernity), or else in *constructivist, balancing* terms. Constructivist framings include a reflexive (yet rather monolithic, in cultural terms) understanding of modernity, and a kaleidoscopic understanding of 'modernities' as plural ontology integrating diverse cultural matrixes.

The frame 'expansive modernity' sees the world as a functionalist articulation of ontologically independent spheres (economy, society, environment) that need to be brought into harmony though 'smart', 'triple-win' solutions. It depicts *homo economicus* as most accurate anthropological model and stresses a "negative freedom" *from* external constraints to individual choice (Gould, 2008) (which rests on an allegedly endogenous, pre-given structure of views and preferences). In accordance with this anthropological model, it prescribes utilitarian (and hence managerial) governance frameworks to deal with the multiple crisis, including "economizing the ecology" as a way of "ecologizing the economy" (Mol, 1997). Rationality is understood as a monolithic, positivistic Cartesian benchmark to assess the validity of any knowledge. Systemic or civilizational risk is dealt with through an axiomatic 'faith in progress' and indefinitely continuing economic growth or capital accumulation and (capital-intensive) technological development is taken for granted (Huesemann & Huesemann, 2011). Modern civilization is 'too big to fail' (Stengel, 2011), positive thinking is 'in'(Kallis, 2017) and, in some places, such as the USA, optimism regarding the 'American way of life' is a matter of patriotism (Weizsäcker, Hargroves, Smith, Desha, & Stasinopoulos, 2009).The ecological overshoot of current development trajectories is depicted as a technical 'problem', solvable through technical efficiency and consistency strategies that will make it possible to decouple continued economic expansion from the degradation

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Eurocentrism through a series of particular 'monocultures' (universalistic ontology and epistemology, a lineal understanding of time and progress, economicism, etc.), as opposed to an "ecology of knowledges". The term 'plural modernities' connotes the multiplicity and plurality of societal models that are part, in this plurality, of the modern world.

of natural resources and life-support systems. Property and economic structures rely on commodification and public investment for rising productivity and the creation of exchange value.

Non-naturalistic and non-evolutionistic understandings of modernity are divided here into two ideal-types, on the basis of how strong a role the cultural element plays in them. Both the 'balancing modernity' or 'reductive modernity' (H. Welzer) and the 'plural modernities' see the economy as embedded into society, and both into nature, which sets both conditions of possibility and limits to socio-economic development. Both uphold the anthropological view of a *homo solidaris*: building on the insights from empirical economics, psychology, neurology and the new and interdisciplinary field of happiness research, empathy and cooperation are as much a defining trait of human nature as individualistic utility-maximization and competition (Rifkin, 2009; Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014, p. 66). Pluralistic framings will further emphasize celebrative, symbolic, transcendent elements as a driving force in human existence (Estermann, 1998; Schneidewind, Santarius, & Humburg, 2013), questioning the ethos of *usefulness* (Aguilar et al., 2015) and foregrounding ideas such as time-prosperity *(Zeitwohlstand)*. Correspondingly, non-expansionist framings of modernity would rather prescribe relational political steering or co-evolutionary governance emphasizing socio-technical and cultural embeddedness. Freedom is framed as "positive freedom" *for* the collective development of human potential (Gould, 2008). The "freedom to consume" in externalization societies (Lessenich, 2016) upholding imperial (Brand & Wissen, 2017) subsidized (Miegel, 2010) modes of living comes at the expense of expropriating others – the global south, women, indigenous peoples, future generations – of their own freedom. Rationality is understood as socio-culturally embedded, and knowledge is validated through constructivist epistemologies ranging from trans-disciplinarity and citizen participation in academic knowledge-production to the increasing the social and political relevance of multiple forms of knowledge; replacing the 'monoculture' of scientific knowledge with an "ecology of knowledges" (Santos, 2008). Indeed: in a context of generalized vulnerability and high uncertainty, science becomes "more and more necessary but less and less sufficient for a socially binding definition of truth" (Beck, 1992, p. 156).

This argument bases on both considerations of justice ('cognitive justice') and of the strength/ resilience of decentralized complex systems ("no one is as smart as everyone"), which makes a pragmatic case, particularly in the face of systemic or civilizational risk, opening up a "space for the inventiveness and creativity of the imagination, which has been blocked by economicist, developmentalist, and progressive totalitarianism" (Latouche, 2009, p. 9).

Table 4: Meaning structure of alternative understandings of modernity as meta-frame in the GT debate

		Plural Modernity	Reductive Modernity	Expansive Modernity
Ontological assumptions	**Nature/society**	Social-ecological embeddedness	Social-ecological embeddedness	Three pillars of sustainability
	Ecological limits	"Enjoyable limits"	Planetary boundaries as bottomline	Planetary boundaries orientation
Anthropological assumptions	**Human nature**	Homo solidaris / Homo celebrans	Homo solidaris	Homo economicus
	Freedom / autonomy	Freedom 'for' (positive) Individual interdependence / economic autonomy	Freedom 'for' (positive) Individual interdependence / economic autonomy	Freedom 'from' (negative) Individual autonomy / economic interdependence
Epistemological assumptions	**Rationality**	Multiple rationalities	Embedded rationality	Cartesian rationality
	Knowledge	Diversification of knowledges (constructivism)	Transdisciplinarity & democratization of science (constructivism)	Scientific knowledge (positivism)
Moral & political values and assumptions	**Risk**	Risk-loosening / diversification Resilience	Risk avoidance: Rebound-Effect	Faith in ‚progress': decoupling hypothesis
	Governance	Political	Political / co-evolutionary	Techno-managerial
	Technology	Technology skepticism Convivial technologies	Technology skepticism	Technological optimism
	Development	Postdevelopment	Development in the South	Development in North and South
	Sustainability strategies	Sufficiency / good life	sufficiency	Efficiency/ consistency
	Property	Commons	Public goods/ Commons	Private Goods/ public goods
	Economy	Reproduction	Reproduction	Production

Growth-orientation and capital accumulation are seen as a historically contingent form of socio-economic organization, and therefore - particularly when factoring in ecological constraints - as necessarily finite. Furthermore, the current pursuit of exploitative and destructive economic growth

constitutes a flagrant means-ends inversion (Stengel, 2011, p. 350). The unquestioned faith in technological development is viewed as a dogmatic belief, and a largely unsubstantiated one in the face of unfulfilled eco-modernist promises of *decoupling*. Sufficiency-orientation thus becomes a political and cultural imperative if an ecological Armageddon is to be averted and the integrity of the social bond preserved/restored. The implications of sufficiency may imply pursing short-term recovery growth in the south and degrowth in the north, following a 'contraction and convergence'-type of geo-economic arrangement (Global Commons Institute, 1996), or giving up on the ideology of development altogether and seek for new models of collective human realization (Gudynas & Acosta, 2011b; Wolfgang. Sachs, 2010). Self-made and/or self-controllable 'convival technologies' (Adloff & Leggewie, 2014; Illich, 1973) are welcome as easing the path towards a modern form of subsistence. Property-regimes are loosened and private property largely substituted by public goods and re-commonalization. The economy is redefined to cater for a healthy reproduction of society and nature (Biesecker & Hofmeister, 2014).

B. Understanding of 'reality'

Besides the competing understandings of modernity, another pervasive cleavage in the GT debate pertains the ontological status of *reality*: according to Foucault, reality is defined as the result of the balance of power amongst diverse "regimes of truth", which are, in turn, sustained through *discursive formations*, i.e. discursive groupings that follow historically institutionalized sets of rules for discourse production (Keller, 2012). A clear distinction can be drawn here between two discursive formations I will call *'pragmatic-realists'* and *'eco-realists'*. For the system-conservative postures, 'reality' – as defined by the current socio-cultural and political status quo. Progress towards socio-ecological goals are correspondingly measured against the benchmark of the current situation. Eco-realists, in turn, would measure success against the benchmark of scientifically-supported ecological imperatives.

While conceptions of hard ecological limits strongly influenced discourses in the 1970s, the pragmatist approach has characterized the most influential voices in Western sustainability debate since the 1980s (Gómez-Baggethun & Naredo, 2015). Pivotal in the rise of environmental pragmatism as a dominant frame was the Brundtland-Report of 1987. Aguilar et al.'s (2015) analysis of the rhetorical resources of the Brundtland report unveils the mechanisms of discursive closure operating at the foundations of the eco-modernist worldview underpinning the 'sustainable development consensus'. Such closure is largely attained through rhetorically tools configuring a matrix of cognitive 'evidences' whose

performative effect is to close down alternative understandings of key structuring concepts in the discursive domain. The most recurrent linguistic *dispositif* of the Brundtland-authors to this effect is the introduction of 'preconstituted' statements; conceptual constructs that are treated as 'objects' whose unicity and stability is not articulated within the text's argument, but rather appears as given beforehand, with a reality-constitutive effect: 'development', 'poverty', 'ecological problems', etc. thus come already gift-wrapped into the discourse. This elicits an ideological effect, insofar they reclaim acknowledgement as if they were transparent, self-evident phenomena, thereby "annihilating other temporalities, other memoirs, other contributions to the construction of inter-human relationships and of other forms of relating to time and space" (Aguilar et al., 2015, p. 105). Poverty is not only naturalized, but also blamed as a source of pollution, thus effectively sidelining conceptions which had until then blamed opulence for the same problem. Discursive diversity is demonized as a divisive form of 'politics of suspicion'. Instead, there stands the "world-community" heroically confronting the challenges facing ‚humanity', an undifferentiated 'we' featuring only one tension or antagonism: that between present and future generations (Brand, 2014d, p. 255). The ontological elimination of alternatives reported by Alguilar et al. powerfully stretches into the Green Economy documents in our sample, particularly those by the OECD and UNEP, who deliberately produce alternative political views as non-existent. This is rendered particularly visible when contrasted with the competing narratives in the rest of the documents in Sample 1. Even Fücks – while fully aligned with UNEP and OECD GE narrative – feels compelled to make his critique of growth critics an integral and explicit part of his argument, thereby lending them ontological entity.

At the opposite corner of pragmatics stand 'eco-realists', who derive their sense of reality not from the prevailing socio-cultural, economic, and political configurations, but from the knowledge of bio-physical system-boundaries for the reproduction of life on the planet. Changing society accordingly thus becomes not a 'political project', but a factual imperative commanding adaptation (Miegel, 2010, p. 163). So while *eco-realists* may see themselves as 'pioneers of the a new system', or 'concrete-utopists' (Bloch, 1995; Wright, 2013), pragmatic realists rather see them as a "drop of water on a hot stone". Decisive is not whether ecological constraints are acknowledged or not, but what defines the scope of possibility (i.e. what is deemed 'realistic' or feasible) for the 'steering of social evolution': *For pragmatists, t*he challenge of sustainability may well be historically unprecedented, but modern civilization is 'too big to fail', and has proven its adaptability and capacity to re-invent itself time and again. The future becomes determined by the past and present. Eco-realists, in turn, tend to emphasize the radical

novelty of current historical challenges and the experimentalist path into the future, which is portrayed as a *terra incognita*, rather than an extrapolation of the present and past into the future[128].

C. Understanding of 'the good life': Normative assessment of the respective understandings of modernity and reality

A shared worldview (i.e. a common understanding of modernity or of reality) does not necessarily imply a shared normative assessment of the world. Miegel (2010, p. 14), for example, blamed scientists for conveyed their findings with a negative connotation, "portraying sufficiency as a burden and excess as a virtue". Indeed, the storyline of conservative contraction understands modernity as expansive, yet argues for 'muzzling' it based on ecological concerns. At the same time, it welcomes the opportunity the exhaustion of currently hegemonic wasteful (progressive critics would add: exploitative) ways of life presents for a society-wide restoration of traditional values such as a stronger family-bonds and clan-solidarity. However, insofar the conservative argument grows out of the push of moral duty rather than out of the pull of historical promise, the case can be made that green (or eco-)modernists and conservatives share both a common understanding of modernity and of the good life, though not the same parameters for defining 'realism'. Unsurprisingly then, does Fücks lament the "pessimism of growth-critics", from whom one would get the sense that "Europe has left her greatest times behind" (2013, p. 29). Yet emancipatory critics of growth and consumerism have a much more cheerful image of themselves: instead of the 'freedom to consume', they yearn for the 'right to sufficiency', and decry the world's "fatigue with the clutter and waste" of hegemonic Western lifestyles as the burden. Hence, they see no contradiction in the idea of "enjoyable limits", and see a hopeful path forward – especially for the excluded and the victims of "imperial ways of life" of the global consumer class – in "a sort of synthesis of traditions that have been lost and a modernity to which they have been denied access" (Latouche, 2009, p. 62). The same prescriptions for or visions of the future are seen as optimistic, desirable, a worth-striving-for utopia by the one camp; and as dystopian, pessimistic, and undesirable by the other. This evidence allows to conclude that, while the Conservative Contraction (CC) and the emancipatory Green Society (GS) storylines uphold different ideals of the good life (which find some overlap in their convergent emphasis on material frugality and greater social importance awarded to

[128] Critical voices in the 1970s debate on limits to growth rejected mechanistic extrapolations of the present into the future as "anti-scientific", as they disregarded "possible qualitative changes in the global context, as well as potentially revolutionary changes in production patterns to meet social needs and in the technologies to achieve such changes (Varsavsky, 1974, p. 36)

Tim Krasner's "intrinsic values"), they share a notion of 'realism' as defined by an ecological bottom-line.

Noteworthy is also the asymmetry observable in the ascriptions of meaning to the respective counterpart in the dispute: while conservationist discourses centered on the preservation of 'pristine' natural landscapes, for example, have indeed historically often exhibited an anti-modernist rhetoric, sufficiency-based conceptions of the good life in the GT debate (as per the discursive samples analyzed) tend to emphasize a natural synergy or complementarity with efficiency- and consistency-based strategies and technological progress (Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014, p. 20). Indeed, sufficiency is even predicated as a precondition for the modernist values of efficiency: without a sufficiency-orientation, efficiency gains are lost to consumerism (Acosta, 2015a, pp. 150–155). In his comprehensive volume about sufficiency, Oliver Stengel (2011, pp. 348–349) showcases the fallacy of opposing modernization and sufficiency through the example of the popular TV show *Star Trek*: a futuristic vision combining sufficient ways of life with high technological development. Eco-modernist GE-advocates, on the other hand, tend to frame sufficiency and efficiency as mutually exclusive political options (Fücks, 2013, p. 154).

Frames per storylines: what can be learned from frame-analysis?

This section aims at matching the interpretative schemes presented above with the four storylines synthesized in Section 3.3.2, which make up our central unit of discourse analysis. Figure 6 below help categorize the four typified storylines in terms of the frames they transport. The differing conceptions of reality and of modernity – with their respectively implied (though often unarticulated) ontological, epistemological, anthropological, and moral and political assumptions – make up a first double-axis, which is *descriptive*. The second axis is a *normative* one: as we saw, these alternative conceptions of the world can be framed in a positive or in a negative light, according to narratively explicit or implicit conceptions of the good life.

Figure 6: Categorization of the four typified narratives in terms of their framing-structure.

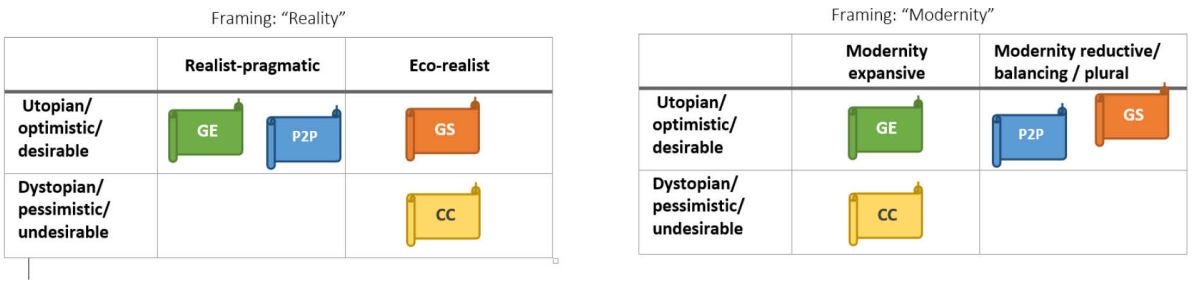


Figure 6 gives direct visual access to how the four storylines play out in terms of (non-)allegiances with one another, and in which regard. In terms of shared frames and value-attributions, GE and GS have little in common, except that both portray their respective visions as something worth striving for; that is: as pathways toward a good life. P2P joins into this optimism, while its co-evolutional view of history bridges both antagonistically defined understandings of reality: a non-expansive modernity, based on localized modern subsistence-production and global knowledge production, is seen as achievable (even as already underway) *from a pragmatic viewpoint*. Conservatives in the GT debate share the expansionist understanding of modernity of their liberal counterparts advocating a Green Economy, and the implicit utilitarian and individualistic assumptions. Yet in light of the impending global ecological catastrophe, they envision not hopeful but dire consequences as a result of this cultural setting, and in consequence advocate a 'damming of modernity' through wholesale cultural change, a withdrawal of welfare state provisions in favor of a retreat into the security of small-world solidarity networks, a greater responsibility and inventiveness o individuals to take care of themselves and of their kindred ones. Like other influential conservative frames in the contemporary world ('TINA/ there is no alternative', 'austerity' politics, etc.), the CC-narrative is not driven by the hope of a *promise*, but by *fear* (H. Rosa, 2010): the fear of socio-ecological demise if things do not change fundamentally. Interestingly thus, as a consequence, while CC largely shares the same interpretative templates with GE, at the same time they partly feather the nest of sufficiency-advocates and growth-critics in the GS-camp, with whom they share the bottomline-conception of ecological boundaries as defining reality, although the dark, dystopian, resigned note of CC does not resonate with the spirit of 'enjoyable limits' (Schneidewind et al., 2013) of GS.

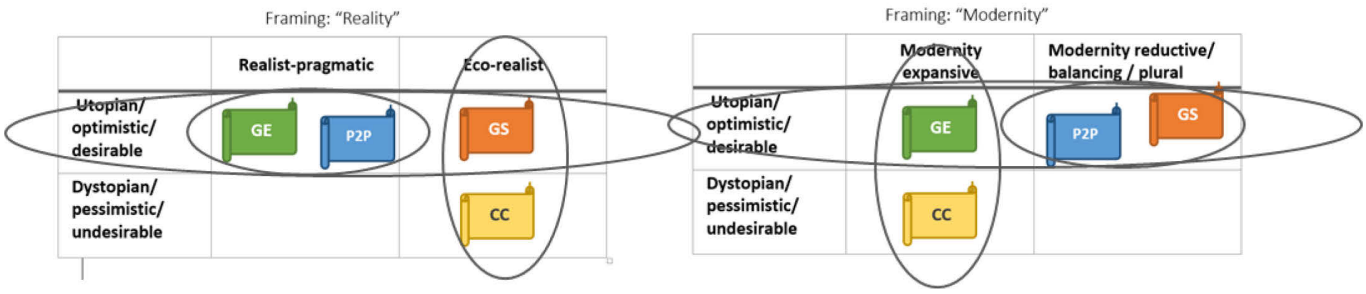
The P2P-storyline, in turn, rather shares the emancipatory worldview of the Green Society, but argues from a materialistic-dialectical perspective rather than in a rights-based, normative, political language. A contest over the definition of reality (and therefore, over the scope of the possible) thus becomes unnecessary, because developments extrapolated from the present into the future are convergent with the normative pathways one could back-cast from science-based ecological imperatives and social

utopias. Like GS-advocates, P2P enthusiasts see modernity as a socio-technical and cultural configuration that can (and will) evolve beyond its expansionist phase towards one of balance between global and local, between market and self-provision, between material and immaterial forms of wealth. Emancipatory agency is still required to reaffirm and further develop that pathway, but the capitalist society is taking care of this herself, unaware that it is undermining its own systemic foundations, or else uncappable – maybe also unwilling, insofar the decisions of individual investors and consumers are not driven by systemic motives - of stopping it, engaging in a suicidal competition in productivity-enhancing technological development that is, paradoxically, threatening the logic of private property itself, in a sort of ironic inversion of the "tragedy of the commons". A relational and embedded understanding of individuals is thus a key means towards a 'Great Transformation' (as stressed in GS), as well as an outcome of it (as stressed in P2P).

For all their differences, GE and GS do share a luminous view of the future - provided their respective prescriptions are followed -, as is also the case with P2P. A glim shadow is projected only from the side of CC, which, no matter what, foresees a future of diminished capabilities for 'humanity', because of the chastity belt it has earned through its historical excesses.

In conclusion: While the Green Economy (GE) and the Green Society (GS) narratives are rather irreconcilable in terms of their diametrically opposing deeply entrenched discourse-structuring assumptions regarding the conceptualization of modernity and their perception of reality, *the storylines of Conservative Contraction (CC) and P2P Society lay bridges* between some of these opposing assumptions among the two major contenders: P2P is pragmatic like GE – it's view of a transformation departs from what *is*, not what *should be* – yet challenges its expansive view of modernity, where it rather aligns with GS: current socio-technical developments set guardrails that will lead historical trajectories towards post-mass-production industrialism and post-capitalism. Unlike GS, however, this is not a matter of overthrowing an all-mighty economic system by harnessing social and political forces against it, but rather of picking the right 'historical wave' to ride. CC, in turn, shares a common worldview with GE in terms of anthropological, ontological, and epistemological, and political-philosophical assumptions, but aligns with GS in the need to fundamentally shift the evolutionary course of Western modern societies in the face of the current systemic overshot planetary boundaries. Finally, GE, GS, and P2P offer the *pull of the promise* of an optimistic vision of the future, while CC bases its discursive force on the *push of a menace*. Figure 7 below summarizes this visually.

Figure 7: GT-frames and brokering narratives



3.4. Integral Analysis: Structuring the discursive field of the GT debate

Revisiting the goals proposed at the beginning of this chapter, we sought to answer the central question about in what ways ideational elements can enable transformative agency to drive a GT forward. To answer this question, this chapter engaged in two main tasks: a) identifying and structuring the ideational (i.e. discursive-representational) components of the GT debate (key themes, narratives, frames), and b) assessing their actual and potential articulations alongside a triadic model pinpointing unitive, divisive, and bridging elements, whereby the latter present themselves as ideational enablers for agency to draw on for advancing transformative learning.

While the concluding section for each of the sub-steps of analysis already advanced the task of factoring upcoming findings into an evolving picture, this last section of the chapter seeks to draw overarching conclusions, integrating all of the sub-steps into a final picture of what, in Chapter 1, following Keller, we called *interpretive repertoire of* the GT-field of discourse.

3.4.1. Analysis of shared interpretive repertoires

Through a summary-juxtaposition of the sub-steps of discursive analysis, Table 5 below provides the input for their interpretative triangulation towards an integral analysis of the GT-discursive field:

Table 5: Summary view of sub-steps of fine-tuned analysis of the GT Debate per storyline

	Narrative markers	***Rhetorical markers***	Phenomenal-structural markers	Frames
GREEN ECONOMY	Cause: capital misallocation	*'market (and state) failure'*	- Addresses only supply-side of the economy	Realist-pragmatic (utopian)

(GE)	Goal: Green Economy (resource-light, de-carbonized, steadily expansive)	*'Green Konradtiev'*	- growth as technical imperative, culturally consubstantial, and ecologically compatible - Commodification of material and immaterial (IPRs) resources - Cultural change not object but outcome of the transformation - (re-)localization culturally undesirable (contra cosmopolitanism) and unrealistic. Methodological nationalism & international competition. - Back-to-full-employment and labor-productivity increase through structural boost of 'green jobs' - Compensatory redistribution to 'losers' of transformation - Improved political (representative) democracy through enlarged participation	Expansive modernity (utilitarian *homo economicus*, individualistic negative freedom, three pillars of sustainability)
	Strategy: growth, Green tech, Green regulation & infrastructure	*"off towards new shores"* *"flight forward"*		
	Agents: green (Keynesian) state; Green business & enlightened consumers	*'Green New Deal'* *'buy to save the world'*		
	Anti-subjects: sufficiency-advocates, growth-critics	*"dangerous distraction"* *"ideological groundless revolutionaries"* *"drop of water on a hot stone"* *"modern-day luddites"* *"enemies of modernity"* *"tyranny of virtue"*		
	Obstacles: Brown-economy veto-players	*'brown lobby'; 'climate skepticism'*		
	Beneficiaries: "humanity", 'developing' countries, urban dwellers, green industry workers	*"right to development"* *"right to consumption"*		
GREEN SOCIETY **(GS)**	Cause: Multiple interlinked crisis/ civilizational crisis	*"living beyond the means of others"*	- Emphasis on demand-side of the economy: sufficiency desirable, feasible (advantageous), - Growth as technical imperative, but cultural and ecological problem - Degrowth vs a-growth - Growth withdrawal as a northern or global program	Eco-realist (utopian) Balancing (reductive) modernity /plural modernities (relational *homo solidaris*, economy ecologically and social embedded, positive freedom)
	Goal: Green Society ("right measure for time, space, property, and market")	*"enjoyable limits"*		
	Strategy: Macro-economic and institutional re-design away from growth-imperative (framing), orienting towards sufficiency, and shaping concrete options	*"meaking it easier to live the good life"*		

	Agents: 'Enabling state' nurturing change agents/ pioneers in civil society & science	*"seeds of the transformation"* *"militant optimism"*	- (Partial) decommodification of material and immaterial resources - collective-political cultural change as object and outcome of the transformation of material structures - Bio-regionalism: (re-)localization (at least of subsistence-critical activities) desirable/ vital for cultural (preserve ecology of cultures), ecological (reduce pollution from trade), and subsistence-security reasons - Redistribution of available paid-work: holistic labor policy (supporting care, self-provisioning, and civic engagement), balance productive and reproductive work - Transformative material redistribution as a remedy to consumerism (trumping positional consumption, increasing social harmony, etc.). Also of land, non-renewable resources, intangibles (time, soc. Recognition). Redistribution btw.: a) north and south (e.g. ecological debt) b) public-private domain c) capital and (re)productive activities - High-intensity democracy in political, economic, cultural life; and in science.	
	Obstacles: socio-economic & cultural path-dependencies (+ green economy advocates)	*"delusion of growth" (Wachstumswahn)* *"rebound effect"* *"myth of decoupling"* *"myopic choice"*		
	Beneficiaries: Present & future generations Urban and rural residents Exploited of the world (south, nature, women)	*"Right to sufficiency" (v. Winterfeld)* *"tyranny of majorities"*		
CONSERVATIVE CONTRACTION (CC)	Cause: Consumerism and State expenditure	*"Living beyond our means"*	- Emphasizes the supply-side of the economy - Growth ecologically incompatible overdetermining other dimensions. - Individual moral and cultural change as central object of transformation: asceticism and clan-solidarity (moral appeal) as a remedy to consumerism - (re-)localization as ecological imperative - Work-life split between gainful employment, self-employment, subsistence, and care.	Eco-realist (dystopian) 'Dammed' modernity (roll-back) *(homo economicus* + clan-solidarity, ecological hetero-determination, economy ecologically and social embedded)
	Goal: Roll-back consumerism and economic expansionism	*"fair administration of scarcity"*		
	Strategy: Retreat of the state and strengthening of communal and family-bonds and traditional cultural values. Self-reliance / asceticism			
	Agents: Entrepreneurial and enlightened consumers and politicians			

	Obstacles: Welfare-state inertias, trade unions, consumer culture, financial speculation	*"artificial paradise of abundance"*		
	Beneficiaries: Humanity, future generations			
P2P SOCIETY (P2P)	Cause: Artificial scarcity creation & externalization through capitalist commodification		- Dissolves the boundary btw supply and demand: prosumer economy - Growth rendered irrelevant (→ a-growth) - Decommodification of material and immaterial resources (starting with knowledge) - Culture changes in co-evolutionary fashion with socio-technical systems - Glocalism: globalization of design with (re-)localization of (micro)factories - experimental combinations of democratic, hierarchical, and polyarchic (i.e. peer governance) forms of operational and political organization	Pragmatic-realist (utopian) Reductive/ plural modernities (relational *homo solidaris, e*conomy embedded in socio-technical infrastructures, positive freedom)
	Goal: Glocal P2P-collaborative and commons-based society	*"collaborative age"* *"eclipse of capitalism"*		
	Strategy: IoT infrastructure, P2P value-creation, 'economies of scope'. market embedded in the collaborative commons			
	Agents: P2P networks of prosumers -entrepreneurs Partner state			
	Obstacles: IPR regimes / capitalist capture of collaborative value-creation			
	Beneficiaries: "Humanity" Present and future generations Commoners & prosumers			

Phenomenal structure analysis gave us insights into the structure of sub-discourses around axial themes within the GT-debate. Central categories and cleavages within and across the sub-discourses were identified, including which axial themes – through their very phenomenal constitution – constitute a 'watershed' in the GT debate (GDP growth, sufficiency, re-localization), and which can serve as 'floating signifiers' (democratization, cultural change, restructuration of work, etc.). Also, broad arenas of convergence across the debate were identified, helping establish the bottom-line in the GT discussion as distinct from that of mainstream sustainable development.

Narrative analysis organized the discursive elements identified above in typified, coherent storylines (GE, GS, CC, and P2P), each with their own account of causes of the multiple crisis, vision of and strategies for the transformation, contextual windows of opportunity identified, envisaged change agents, obstacles and beneficiaries. Furthermore, since narratives/storylines are the main discursive

vehicle for meaning-making and meaning-transportation, and since they can be empirically linked more directly to discursive agents, they were deemed our main structuring-unit of discursive analysis. Frame analysis revealed fundamental divisions and bridges among the typified storylines regarding their respective *conceptions of modernity* (with corresponding ontological, anthropological, epistemological, and causal assumptions; as well as in moral and political-philosophical assumptions), in *conceptions of reality* (political-pragmatic vs. eco-realists, including controversial technical matters), and in disputed *conceptions of the good life* (normative values and preferences).

These three sub-steps of analysis provided us with diverse analytical tools to try and understand the main cleavages in the GT debate, and how they have been or could be bridged. Tensions and affinities are observable in diverse of these discursive elements distilled through fine-tuned analysis, which we will seek to visualize more clearly through recapitulation and articulation of the partial findings.

What unites

Consensual discursive markers in the GT debate are, on the ecological front: the *ubiquitous language of crisis*, the reinsertion of the 1970s concept of *ecological limits* into the discursive landscape (now re-packaged as 'planetary boundaries', and the corresponding emphases on systemic interdependencies and dynamics), as well as the radically altered biophysical state of the Earth (Anthropocene). On the socio-cultural front: the importance of a systemic outlook, social innovation, multi-level spatiality and temporalities, and going beyond incrementalism in approaching social change. Furthermore, the concept of Anthropocene implies the likelihood of sudden and abrupt alterations in the dynamics of the Earth-system that cannot be foreseen or dealt with effectively by human agents –, and that this *radical uncertainty must be taken into account in sustainability governance*[129]. This level of discursive consensus is epitomized by the WBGU-report "Social contract for a Great Transformation".

With regard to the big open question of 'what transformation?', our analysis of phenomenal structures revealed that the discursive connotation of a 'Great Transformation' in the German debate – to a large extent – is one of *re-politization of the dominant socio-economic and cultural matrix of the West* (the object of re-politization varies from neoliberal capitalism to industrialism and the philosophical foundations of the modern project), particularly with regard to a redefinition of the society-environment equation, in a way that harmonizes (global) ecological interdependences and socio-historical diversity.

[129] Workshop lecture by Bruno Latour: http://bruno-latour.fr/sites/default/files/downloads/00-BREAKTHROUGH-06-15_0.pdf; accessed 2. June 2017

Furthermore, the debate is transversed by a sense of *historical window of opportunity* presented by forthcoming (or already unfolding) socio-technical (Big Data, Artificial Intelligence, Smart Factory, Internet of Things) developments with a disruptive effect on the material base of Western-style social organization, in particular the modern capitalist institution of *waged labor*.
These findings summarize the discursive repertoire which agents can resort to, for example, when consensus needs to be reaffirmed, incompatibilities need to be pointed out, or systemic implications problematized. This common ground also serves as resonance board for more nuanced discursive affinities to progressively expand the discursive space of debate, making it possible to address topics which would have been unavailable otherwise. So, for example, the consensual ecological argument of 'living beyond our means' can be expanded into the social justice argument of 'living beyond the means of others'. (Lessenich, 2016)

What divides

The three sub-steps of our analysis delivered distinct insights into the cleavages in the GT debate, which can be combined for a kaleidoscopic access to the whole field of discourse.

The analysis of phenomenal structures revealed that not all of the axial themes of the GT debate are equally controversial (better: not all prompt the type of controversy that goes virtually unmitigated). The starkest cleavages are built around three axial themes: the discussions around *GDP growth* as goal of the political economy; around *sufficiency* as a possible substitute for this orientation of the political economy, and *re-localization* as reconstruction of the socio-territorial embeddedness of the economy. These three axial themes can be regarded as clear watersheds in the GT debate. Phenomenal structure analysis further showed that the meaning-structure of the axial themes *commons*, *cultural change*, *democratization*, and *redistribution* are relatively more elastic ('floating signifiers'), and allow for narrative variations. Lastly, and while still controversial in terms of the 'how' question, the axial theme *work-restructuration* offers the most promising platform for a fertile engagement of all parties in the discussion. Hardly a surprise, then, that it is in this sub-discourse were policy-proposals are incipiently emerging; examples are proposals around a substantial reduction in working hours, an unconditional subsistence-insurance (Universal Basic Income), or else an enlargement of self-provision capabilities through the building up or strengthening of social and economic infrastructures fostering solidarity and collaborative production.

Phenomenal structure analysis and frame analysis combined produced a comprehensive yet synthetic picture of the types of cleavages traversing the debate across the axial themes:

1) *Disputed signifiers*, where cleavages can be structured around the axis of diverse understandings of *modernity* – expansive, reductive/balancing, and plural. Each of these implies different and often contrasting assumptions about the world: ontological (the nature/society equation and the status of 'ecological limits'); epistemological (the conception of reason, positivist vs. constructivist epistemologies, and the status of scientific knowledge vis-à-vis other forms of knowledge); anthropological (*homo economicus* vs. anthropologies emphasizing empathy, solidarity, and the celebrative aspect of life); moral and political (status of property, management of risk, style of governance, ideological elaborations of the idea of development, etc.).

2) Discrepant notions of reality or *realism* (i.e. what is considered feasible), pitting eco-realists against pragmatic realists: while the former departs from ecological boundaries as bottom-line for the design of social-transformative interventions, the latter depart from the status quo as boundary of the possible. This cleavage is rooted, among other things, in *controversial assessment of technical matters*, particularly the possibility of *decoupling* continued economic growth from the degradation of ecosystems and the unsustainable exploitation of non-renewable natural resources (decoupling hypothesis), and other issues such as the resilience or adaptability of current macro-economic structures, including a monetary system based on fiat-money (Ludewig, 2017; Peukert, 2017; Richters & Siemoneit, 2017).

3) Discrepant *conceptions of the good life*, and hence contrasting value-attributions to the same object of discussion (e.g. sufficiency as curtailment vs. sufficiency as freedom)

The cleavages identified above are interwoven with diversely combined and emphasized axial themes in narrative structures, which we disclosed through the model of Actantial analysis (Greimas). The reconstructed narratives were further condensed into ideal-typical structures which, for shorthand, we

called *storylines:* Green Economy (GE), Green Society (GS), Conservative Contraction (CC), and P2P-society (P2P). Cleavages here were reconstructed alongside the following set of narrative categories:

Diagnosis: the four storylines present diverse diagnoses regarding the span and scope of the multiple crisis. The key divisive question is whether we are facing a crisis of the current functioning of established social structures of Euro-Atlantic modernity (neoliberal mode of regulation) (GE), or rather a crisis of the structures themselves. Euro-Atlantic modernity is variably problematized by the three latter storylines in terms of its accumulation regime (capitalism) (most of GS, except the *new social contract* strand[130], P2P); its (re)production-system (industrialism and the concomitant crisis of socio-natural reproduction) (most of GS, except the *new social contract* and *solidarity-based modernity* strands), or its cultural matrix (individualism, utilitarianism, anthropocentrism, patriarchy, etc.) (partly CC, all of GS)

Goal/ vision: Corresponding to the diverse diagnoses, the key cleavage here is about the logic of the 'Great Transformation': is the utilitarian, expansionist logic of the dominant vision of an 'expansive modernity' to be fundamentally challenged (GS, P2P), tamed (CC), or rather harnessed toward the goal of a transformation (GE)?

Opportunities/ strategies: According to the diagnoses and visions, the axial themes are variably combined and assessed, outlining a course of action. As we learned from phenomenal structure analysis, there is a widely-shared assessment of an inevitable fundamental alteration in the material base of society across the discursive field, yet disputed assessment of technical matters (decoupling hypothesis) and envisaged trends (industry 4.0 versus Third Industrial Revolution of P2P) give place to correspondingly diverse prescriptions. In a nutshell, GE seeks to correct capital misallocations through state-investment, regulation and appropriate incentive-settings to private economic actors; while GS sees the need to create infrastructures facilitating the mainstreaming of cultural preferences towards sufficiency-based ideals of the good life. CC hopes to mainstream sufficiency through moral appeals to self-restraint, and P2P envisages a technologically enabled shift in the communications- and energy-matrix away from the social order emerged as a result of the first and second industrial

[130] A comparison of the various strands within the GS narrative can be found in Table 3, section 3.3.2 of this chapter

revolutions, to one characterized by P2P collaborative production and horizontal rather than vertical integration of economic activity.

Agency: political (GS) versus techno-managerial steering (GE, CC) of a transformation as central cleavage. The co-evolutionary narrative of P2P society clearly emerges as mediating between the two.

Opponents: Two broad answers are observable to the question of what/ who is hindering transformative progress: one blames the vested interests in the status quo, building an 'us against them' narrative (be it 'the people' or any specific social group against the 'evil elites', as in the most combative strands of GS; or 'humanity', as an undifferentiated subject, against the impersonal forces of the status quo, as in GE or CC); the other frames obstacles as structural (economic path-dependencies, cultural inertias, socio-economic inequality structures) (P2P and most of GS). Here solutions are correspondingly de-personalized and indirect: structural transformations are pre-condition for effective policy-interventions or individual lifestyle-choices to become available in the first place.

Beneficiaries: Here also two broad narrative constructions of who is to benefit from the transformation are observed: one portrays a sociologically empty blanket-concept of 'humanity' as beneficiary, thus rendering any conflict-lines invisible and assuming that 'we are all on the same boat', and therefore 'we are all pushing in the same direction' (GE, CC). The other narrative challenges this hypothesis of automatic convergence, acknowledging the structural divisions emerging from the analytically stronger concept of 'imperial ways of life' pitting the global consumer class against the exploited workers, peasants, and indigenous groups in the global south. The inherent non-generalizability of the 'imperial way of life' implies that, if unchallenged, the human species as a whole is set on a course towards self-damnation.

At the basis of diverse assessment (regarding causes of the crisis, agency, opponents) and prescriptions are discrepant theories of social change. GE and CC adhere to the basic tenets of behaviorist and rational-choice economic theories ('we make society'), while GS and P2P draw on structural-constructivist and practice-based accounts of social change ('society makes us') (Shove, 2010a).

What bridges

Understanding actual and potential bridging elements in the GT debate is the key to understanding its emergence in the German sub-political sphere at the dawn of the 2010s, as well as promising avenues for transformative collective learning. Because of their more direct connection to agency, we seek to structure our findings about meaning-bridging elements as a function of our typified narratives or storylines. The question we seek to answer here is *"which narratives offer bridging elements for which type of cleavages?"*

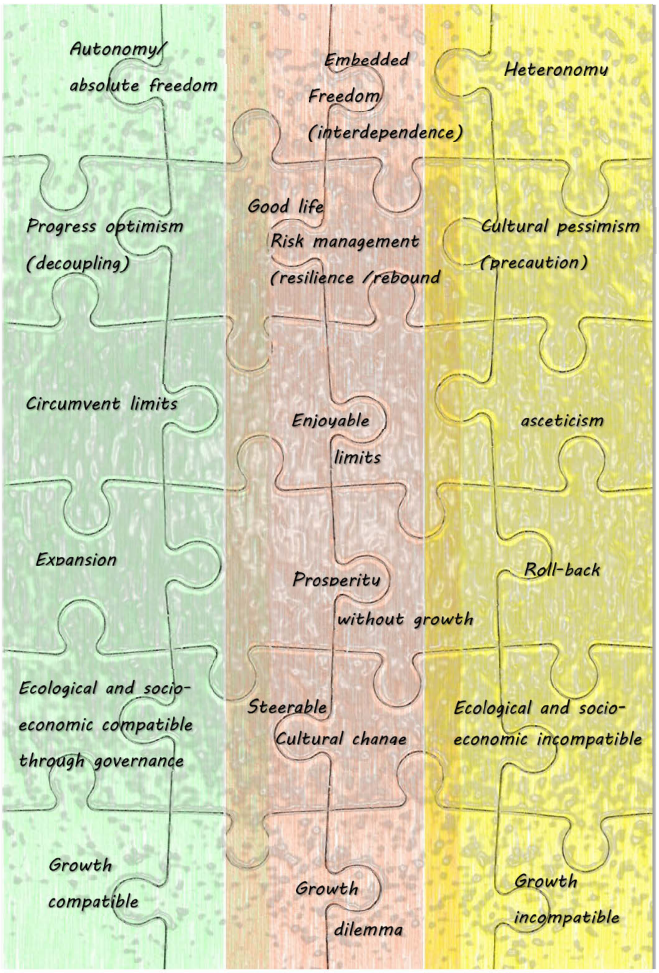
A general insight into this question was anticipated in our conclusion to frame analysis: While GE conveys a pragmatist-realistic frame combined with an expansive understanding of modernity, and is thus diametrically opposed to GS, which rests on eco-realist and alternative-modernity frames, P2P and CC mediate between the two by recombining the framings: P2P combines pragmatism with an alternative understanding of modernity; while CC, in turn, combines eco-realism and the mainstream expansive conception of modernity. Hence, at this level of basic assumptions about the world, *the P2P and CC storylines can actually bridge incompatible meaning structures between GS and GE.*

Yet beyond this rather abstract insight – if the guiding question posed above is to generate answers with real interpretative power – it needs to generate insights into *which particular aspects* in each typified narrative allows to bridge which types of cleavages in the debate. Bridging-elements articulate cleaving-elements alongside the categories identified during the sub-steps of our fine-tuned analysis: a) disputed assumptions and values implicit in clashing conceptions of modernity, b) disputed assessment of technical matters, c) opposing governance styles; as well as d) different conceptions of reality traversing all these categories. As determined above, most of these cleavages cluster around (or else relate to) the axial themes GDP growth, sufficiency, and (re)localization.

The eco-modernist *Green Economy* being the dominant narrative both in the German and in the international sustainable development debate (cf. introductory chapter), our main interest is showing how meaning-articulations (and potential fertilizations) are established – or could be established, depending on how discursive agents make use of the opportunities allowed by meaning-structures – with the two contending narratives of *Green Society* and *Conservative Contraction*. The *P2P-society* narrative, in turn, has not appeared in our analysis as an antagonistic one; probably due to its lack of anchorage in the field of political discourse and to the 'detachment' conveyed by its co-evolutionary plot. It rather appears as a neat bridge-builder by presenting a pragmatic prospect of radical change in the material foundations of the current social order.

I will use a metaphorical visual representation of docking puzzle pieces to display the various elements performing a bridging-function among contending socio-political narratives. In so doing, I will simultaneously seek to reconnect the level of general conclusions with the level of data. Puzzle pieces symbolize the 'elastic' nature of meaning: indeed, the plug of one piece stretches into the socket of the other, thereby blurring the assumed-to-be-straight, linear boundary between meanings. In his seminal work about political utopias, *The Principle of Hope* (1995), Ernst Bloch uses the concept of "surplus of meaning" (*Deutungsüberschuss*) to explain how meaning can be freed from tight discursive grips by tapping into a 'reserve' that any unit of meaning contains in a given discursive context. This "surplus meaning" thus creates re-combination and re-signification potentials that can be drawn upon by discursive agents in meaning-making activities. Figure 8 shows some exemplary discursive elements by means of which GS (in reddish color) bridges – or could be strategically harnessed to bridge – the contending narratives of GE (green) and CC (yellow). The first three rows refer to cleavages around cultural values and the remaining ones cover differing notions of reality and technical controversies. The dichotomy between a supreme freedom understood as dis-embeddedness from any type of external constraint (GE) and a heteronomy derived from conditions of global ecological emergency (CC) are articulated in GS through the idea of interdependence, and a positive reframing of freedom ('freedom *for*' instead of 'freedom *from*').

Figure 8: Meanings in GS bridging GE and CC



Floating signifiers associated with modernity such as 'progress' or 'prosperity' are deployed in GS to challenge the dichotomy expansion vs. contraction emerging from a linear understanding of modernity shared by GE and CC: prosperity is conceivable without economic growth; and ecological or social limits to runaway economic expansion need not be experienced as a castrating or diminishing corset, as the

conservative view portrays it, but can be a liberating and harmonizing path towards human realization. Ecological demands and social demands (consumers, workers) played against each other (CC) vs ecological and social demands portrayed as compatible – even synergetic with the right technical management strategy. GS expands the emancipatory claims of GE to marginalized social groups (reproductive workers, exploited south, future generations), yet recognizes the need for a steered cultural change challenging materialistic expansionist notions of the good life to bring eco- and social into compatibility. Similarly, conflictive views of (green) growth seen as compatible with (precondition for) sustainability and growth seen as fundamentally incompatible with sustainability can find a fertile articulation in the acknowledgement of the 'growth dilemma', i.e. the acknowledgement of the growth imperative in a growth-based economy with the simultaneous problematization of such economy, that nonsensically turns growth from an instrument for the achievement of social wellbeing into an end in itself, locking the world into an unsustainable path. This dilemma can be addressed through a deliberately planned degrowth program enabling adaptation without sacrificing the worst well-off in the population, including the use the steering-power of cultural agents for both deconstructing the illusion that currently preferred modes of consumption can be made compatible with ecological integrity, and for conveying the message that there are other ways to a plentiful life.

Figure 9: Meanings in P2P bridging GE and

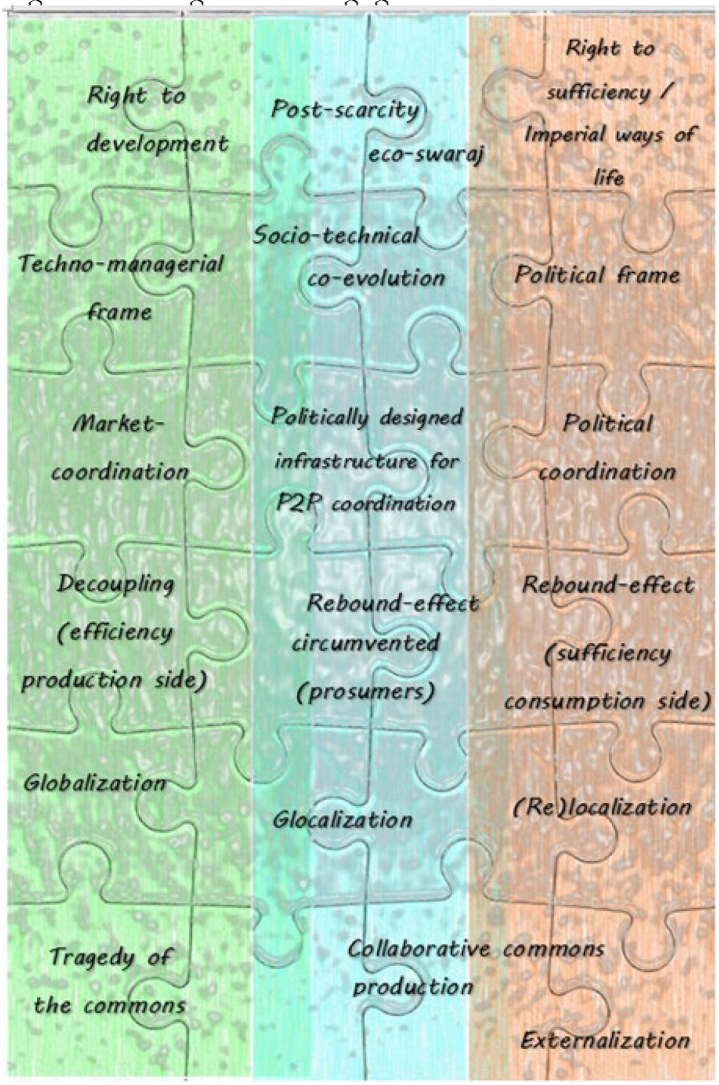
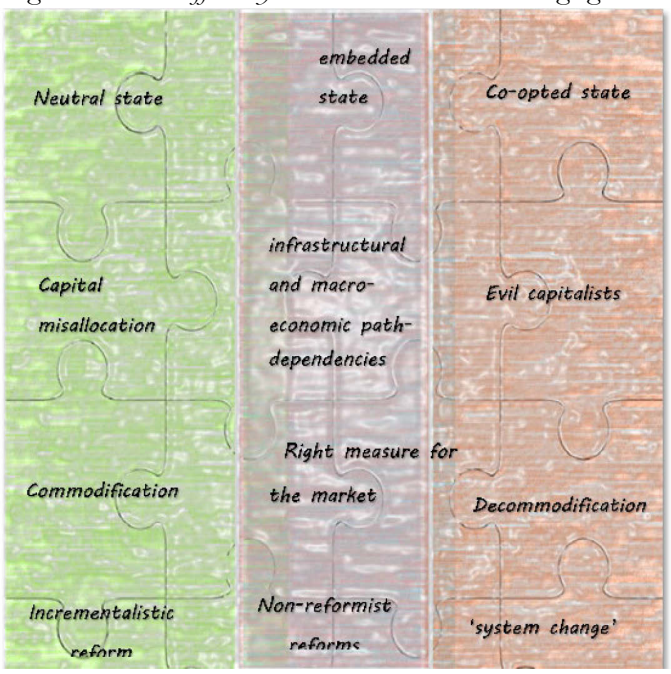


Figure 9, in turn, shows cleavages between GE and GS, featuring opposing governance styles and socio-economic priorities: the former is framed as a cleavage between a techno-managerial and market-based coordination (problem-solving), and a political coordination

(problem-framing). The second one is a cleavage between economic rights and freedoms versus social rights and freedoms, and their corresponding prescriptions.

P2P bridges these cleavages by assuming that a fundamental shift in productive infrastructure will radically alter both supply and demand patterns. An emerging 'third industrial-revolution' infrastructure based on the IoT (Rifkin, 2014) would allow to transcend scarcity-based conceptions of efficiency and sufficiency through integrating the consumption and production spheres and reducing market mediation to its minimum. Furthermore, this would *ipso facto* rule out the rebound-effect and allow for the combination of the advantages of hierarchic, polyarchic, and democratic steering mechanisms, while staying clear of their respective disadvantages.

Figure 10: GS sufficiency-oriented liberal strand bridging GE

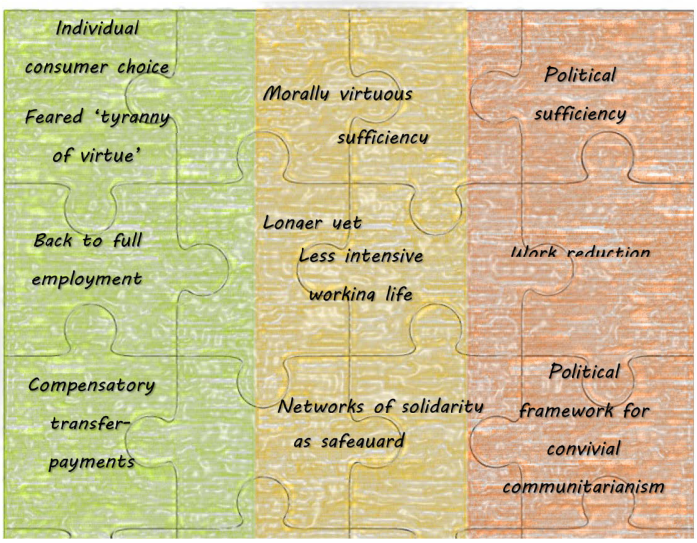


But as our third sample Figure 10 shows, cleavages between GE and GS can also be mediated by elements from GS itself, in particular, by its *sufficiency-oriented liberal strand* (cf. Table 3 in section 3.2.2). This particular strand within the GS narrative deliberately seeks to build up a constructive critique of the hegemonic Green Economy discourse: on the one hand, it seeks to deconstruct its unquestioned assumptions and illuminate its blind spots, but, at the same time, to show how the baby of the GE-narrative does not need to be thrown out with the bathwater (Adrian E. Beling et al., 2018). It does so by harnessing the 'surplus of meaning' of liberal values as mainstream discourse about modernity[131] (Muraca, 2014; Schmelzer, 2015). The examples in Figure 10 address strong clashes in both narratives regarding transformative agents, causes of the crisis (diagnosis), controversial prescriptions, and their systemic implications: the cleavage between the ideas of a neutral state vs. a co-opted state (could be

[131] The surplus of meaning in 'modernity' arises out of the ambiguity of its defining discursive markers. See Castoriadis' reflections about the "imaginary significations of modernity" (1990), and also P. Wagner's "interpretative approach" to modernity (2008).

generalized to governance agents) finds a fertile articulation in the idea of a state embedded in social relations, as it is framed in the critical theories of politics. The competing diagnoses of 'capital misallocation' (quantitative problem, solvable through regulation) vs. the 'inherent nature of capitalist accumulation' (qualitative issue) as source of the multiple crisis can be bridged through the concept of structural path-dependencies or inertias to be unbuilt through an infrastructure facilitating materially sufficient lifestyles; and the rivaling prescriptions of further commodification ('put a price tag', particularly strong IPRs) vs. decommodification/commons can be reconciled through cultural and political debate regarding the "right measure for property and the market". Even the often framed as competing approaches of reform vs. transformation have a fertile cross-pollination in the idea of 'non-reformist reforms' / reforms with an inbuilt 'transformative trojan horse'.

Figure 11: Meanings in CC bridging GE and GS



The last figure in the series (Figure 11) portrays CC as bridge between GE and GS, breaking down our findings from frame analysis into empirically anchored meaning-units: the moralist approach of conservatives stays relatively close to the approach of the enlightened consumer of GE, insofar both rely on individual choice as the driver of social change. Yet the conservative morale has here a materially lighter lifestyle as its object, which brings it closer to the GS emphasis on sufficiency, though differing with it in the political-structural steering towards it. Similarly, the 'back-to-full-employment' argument of GE is confronted with a work reduction argument from GS. As mentioned before, work reduction is progressively gaining support across the political spectrum as a means to create employment opportunities for more people in the face of the persistence of and the anticipated rise in structural unemployment resulting from the new wave of industrial automatization (industry 4.0). The emphasis in a GS narrative, however, is on the redefinition of power relations between employers and employees, and on the increased political and cultural engagement made possible by the freed time of former full-time workers. This is at odds with the entrenched meritocratic ethos of the liberal political discourse nurturing GE. CC introduces a security argument on the need to extend and strengthen family-relationship in the face of shrinking state provisions, which plays into the hands of GS-

advocates. Compensation for less intensive working weeks comes in the form of a longer aggregate working life. Similarly, instead of consumption-fueling compensatory transfer payments for the disadvantaged of the green transformation, CC aligns with GS to advocate for a revival of solidarity bonds. However, while the former restricts solidarity to family or clan-relationships, GS sees the need for a politically organized infrastructure enabling wider social solidarity networks.

3.5. Conclusions of the chapter

Drawing on the discursive variability featured in the German GT debate, this chapter has sought to analytically lay down ideational "docking points for the politization of an alleged lack of alternatives" (U. Brand) that continues to discursively lock the mainstream sustainability debate into empirically ill-founded premises such as 'consensual' stakeholder dialogue, enlightened consumerism, elusive win-win market solutions, or technological 'fixes'. Transformative agency can draw on these ideational-structural windows of opportunity to deploy its creative potential and thereby 'push' collective learning processes towards a social-ecological transformation. In Chapter 4, these ideational structures are brought into dialectical interplay with situational and material ones, yielding a more 'grounded' picture of enablers and constraints that transformative agents encounter.

In order to illuminate the agency dimension and possible discourse coalitions in advancing collective learning, let us summarize the ideational docking points potentially bridging the diverse discursive strands:

The *Conservative Contraction* storyline (CC) introduces an eco-realist perspective into the mainstream worldview of an expansive modernity, with whom it largely shares ontological, anthropological and epistemological assumptions, but opposes some of its core moral and political values and related prescriptions. With the GS, in turn, it shares some of the prescriptions and general orientations in terms of cultural renewal toward de-materialization and the need to mainstream solidarity in social life, though drawing on precautionary arguments rather than on (and often clashing with) emancipatory ones. CC also agrees with GS in disputes around controversial technical assessments regarding the possibility of coming up with a techno-fix to the ecological predicament.

The *Green Society* storyline (GS) deconstructs and therethrough de-naturalizes false absolutes of the dominant discourse around modernity embodied in both GE and CC, and challenges both their prescriptions. Yet in so doing, GS combines and reconciles opposing elements from the expansive hubris of GE and the ascetic ethos of CC, giving way to what could be called an emancipatory vision

of social and ecological re-embeddedness of the economy, that is: the joyful, forward-looking acceptance of ecological and social constraints to the currently dominant mode of socio-economic organization; not as an encroaching corset, as the conservative view portrays it, but as a liberating and balancing path towards human realization. Furthermore, within the relatively heterogeneous GS narrative, the *sufficiency-oriented liberal strand* creates bridges between the widely perceived-as-too-radical tenets of other GS strands (postdevelopmentalists, eco-feminists, and capitalism-critics), and the cultural values of mainstream sustainable development (GE), harnessing the 'surplus meaning' of dominant discourse about modernity. While ecologically uncompromising and socially emancipatory, this approach remains institutionally conservative, as it seeks to transform existing structures that are essential to a liberal world-order, rather than dispensing with them altogether (Schmelzer, 2014). Ecologically radical liberal sufficiency-advocates thus provide multiple docking points with established institutional structures and with widespread cultural values, though largely redesigning material and institutional structures and redefining values by tapping into their 'surplus meaning'. Yet this growth-critical, liberal strand also creates bridges in the opposite direction, thus also meeting key demands from the more radical discourses in the GS-spectrum. It helps bridging the cleavages autonomy vs. eco-heteronomy (through the concept of re-embeddedness); freedom vs. critique of consumerism (e.g. through 'right to sufficiency'), the decoupling controversy (even if the decoupling hypothesis were technically feasible, the good life necessitates 'market-freed' spaces). The one remaining unmitigated tension is between political versus techno-managerial steering. But this is where the P2P-narrative provides bridging elements.

The *P2P-soctiety* storyline (P2P) envisages an already unfolding co-evolutionary diversification of modern trajectory towards an economy and society based on 'modern subsistence'. Rather than proposing a utopia to be conquered by means of political struggle or by techno-managerial governance alone, it makes the pragmatic case of a change in the fundamental material conditions enabling large-scale societal change in late-modern societies. The P2P-Society (P2P) narrative develops the most distinctive plot out of the four typical storylines, insofar it reclaims a descriptive language and therefore remains relatively more detached from normative antagonisms. Moreover, P2P narrative avoids many of the divisive issues (e.g. growth) by implicitly making them irrelevant. P2P further harnesses the hype of technology-centered discourses by awarding the technologically driven shift in socio-technical infrastructures center-stage. Even the idea of an 'eclipse of capitalism' (Rifkin) sounds harmless when compared with inflammatory anti-capitalist rhetoric of the traditional left, yet to identical avail as the latter. It shares the eco-social emancipatory concerns of the GS-narrative (though with a lesser

emphasis on formal recognition of rights and lesser reliance on state-provision), and the self-sufficiency drive of the CC-narrative (yet a socially-embedded rather than an individualistic version of it), highlighting individual commitment and meritocratic peer-control and supervision. These changes, however, require adequate infrastructures as a precondition, which arise in a co-evolutionary fashion, meaning that their emergence depends on socio-political and material-technological developments shaping each other in the 'right way'.

One of the main discursive *loci* of discursive articulation where the above narratives encounter each other – and where the identified synergies can be brought into play – are *intervention proposals* (mainly but not solely state-policies). Let us summarize here some areas of intervention which, based on our own analysis and on that of our sampled authors', hold potential for the above synergies to unfold:

- Massive public investment in eco-efficiency and renewable energies, redistribution, and regulation of financial markets are common demands across the discourse: As mentioned before, setting the key issue of growth aside, there is still significant overlap in short-term prescriptions of both growth-critics and green Keynesians (Schmelzer & Passadakis, 2011, p. 45).
- Short-term *green growth*, as long as it is invested in creating preconditions for overcoming growth-dependency in the longer run.
- A holistic labor-policy supporting care and family work, voluntary civic engagement, and new forms of self-provisioning (Schmelzer & Passadakis, 2011, pp. 80/1-89; Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014, p. 123) – which would find unprecedented legitimacy in the face of the envisaged drastically shrinking global labor market would offer potentially powerful synergies with other policy fields across the scope of the GT-axial themes (sufficiency policies; education policy; universal basic income decoupling subsistence security from work, redistribution to reduce unproductive status competition in consumption, re-localization, etc.)
- Mainstreaming of the transversal field of *time-policy* as "political field of the future" (Garhammer 1999; Weichert 2011, cited in Reisch & Bietz, 2014, p. 34); e.g. support for less speed in everyday life, promoting longer product life (Reisch & Bietz, 2014; Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014, pp. 30; 53)
- Deliberate steering away from our "obsession with work" (Latouche, 2009, p. 40)

Furthermore, interventions alongside 'unproductive' policy-areas would be a rendezvous-point for moral conservatives, socio-technical co-evolutionary pragmatic-realists, and emancipatory realist-

utopians: Indeed, rolling-back materialist obsession and consumerism as threats to the social bond, mainstreaming the idea of indefinite growth as incompatible with ecological sustainability are shared goals. A normative point of convergence could be thus be found around programs providing personal resources/ infrastructure for "making the good life easier" (Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014), i.e. fostering health, leisure, education, social relations of friendship and respect, etc., restoring a balanced relationship between material and non-material aspects of life.

As stated above, the identification of ideational building-blocks and meaning-bridges served the purpose of understanding possible articulations and positive feedback loops reinforcing the dynamics of the GT debate at a structural level, regardless of the strategic intentions of the discursive agents involved. The variegated interpretative repertoire reconstructed in this chapter, as well as the multiple bridging and docking opportunities, and the 'bounded' elasticity of meaning structures implying discursively laden yet still flexible signifiers ('surplus meaning') allow for cross-fertilizing engagement amongst discursive agents; that is: they offer structural discursive preconditions for transformative learning. Indeed, such 'ideational infrastructure' creates multiple opportunities for building plural yet strong "transformative identities", loosening the pressure for identification with mainstream cultural values (what in Chapter 1 we termed the dilemma of the "conflicted" or "hetero-determined" subject). At the same time, a main marker of this form of "transformative identity" is the subrogation of the agency of more or less 'generalized others', ranging from the very abstract concepts of 'nature' or Gaia (as subject) and 'humanity' to the more concrete 'exploited of the South', women, etc.

At the level of agency, however, these structural configurations can be understood as windows of opportunity to foster new articulations, alliances, and promissory interventions (surely also to prevent them). This dimension of agency takes center stage in our analysis in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

The "Great Transformation" as a field of discursive practice

Prosperity without growth is no longer a utopian dream. It is a financial and ecological necessity.

Tim Jackson, 2009

4.1. Introductory remarks

Complementing the interpretative analysis of discursive content in Chapter 3, this chapter seeks to inquire into the *discourse as practice*[132], that is, into the way discourse actually works in terms of mobilizing material and situational elements to produce material, psychological, and cultural-extension effects (J. C. Alexander, 2004; Beasley-Murray, 2013; Keller, 2011), based on the premise that the performativity of a discourse is not to be retrieved from what a discourse 'says', but from the ideational and material effects it actually produces. This chapter thus deals with the Great Transformation as a "walking and talking discourse" (Beasley-Murray, 2013), or, recalling Eder's metaphor in Chapter 1, it reunites the social 'brain', where discursive performances play out, with the social 'mind' where ideational repertoires are located.

The first part of the chapter (section 4.2) presents a detailed reconstruction of the GT field of debate in its pragmatic-material and diachronic dimensions: events, processes, agents, material dispositifs (publications, funding schemes, etc.), and agent practices. This was done through theoretically sampling literature reporting about the GT as discursive process (rather than about its contents) sourced from a triangulation of exploratory interviews, empirical knowledge of the field, and a snowballing, and subjecting these texts (hereafter Sample 2, see Annex 2 and 3) to two successive coding rounds with Atlas Ti, combining a start-list of codes with codes generated inductively from the first coding round, and the interpretive linkage of the resulting code list to yield a timeline and map of the GT debate[133], which was then translated into narrative form.

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[132] Relevant here is an analytic distinction between *practice-as-performance* (as enacted in a given spatiotemporal context); and *practice-as-entity* (the emergent outcome of such performances) (Schatzki, 1996). The object of this chapter fits the first conceptualization of social practice.

[133] Since these data only cover the GT debate development until 2015, updates to 2017 were added when relevant based on secondary literature.

This served as a basis for the 'dramaturgical' analysis to build on, in the second part of the chapter (section 4.3), which binds together the (provisionally and relatively static) ideational perspective of Chapter 3 and the (dynamic) practical-material developments reconstructed in the first part of the present chapter, within the boundaries of analysis set by our research questions.

4.2. Pragmatic contextualization and reconstruction of the GT field of debate

The "all-pervasiveness of the language of crisis" (Escobar, 2013), which spread over to the Global North ignited by the shock of the economic crisis in 2007-2008, constitutes the unmistakable backdrop against which the GT debate unfolds, coupled with the crisis of multilateralism in climate policy (which became evident at the latest after the failure of UNFCCC COP15 in Copenhagen, in 2009) and with the newly reinvigorated debate on welfare models, quality of life indicators, and good life[134]. (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2013a; Rätz, 2012; Reisch & Bietz, 2014; Sandel, 2013; Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2013)

The epochal diagnosis formulated within the GT debate, however, places these conjunctural triggers as contingent consequence of a deeper 'systemic' or *multiple interlinked crisis* (Brand, 2016b; Demirović & Attac, 2011; Dörre, 2009; Narberhaus & Sheppard, 2015). As we saw in Chapter 3, most of the ideational repertoire at play in the GT debate – with exception of the P2P narrative, with its strong technological driver characteristic of the contemporary 'digital modernity' – can hardly be regarded as historically novel[135], but rather largely re-creates the international discursive atmosphere of the early

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[134] The first publication of the World Happiness Report by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) in 2012, for example, is a reflection of growing debates on well-being, happiness, meaningful welfare indicators and good life at the international level (UN, OECD, as well as countries such as France and the USA), and serves to establish these themes globally as a political issue (Reisch & Bietz, 2014, pp. 15, 17). As a sub-field in discussions on welfare and the good life, *time prosperity (Zeitwohlstand)* emerges in empirical studies as a relevant factor for quality of life in northern contexts, leading to the emergence a time-politics and activism (e.g. slow cities) (p. 36-37). On focus are time-regimes as a political variable for social transformation, influencing debates around care, working time, etc. Also in academic life the topic of time is increasingly relevant. E.g. Hartmut Rosa's work on 'acceleration' (H. Rosa, 2005, 2010). Being a discrete aspect of a larger debate, however, debates on time-alienation and time-prosperity will not be further considered in my analysis here.

[135] For a systematic historical analysis of the cyclical recurrence of the critique of industrialism since the 19th Century, see Rolf Sieferle's 1985 book: *Fortschrittsfeinde? Opposition gegen Technik und Industrie*

1970s, characterized by an approach to sustainability as coupled with equality, cooperation, and frugality, among other societal goals (Asara et al., 2015; Bäckstrand & Lövbrand, 2007; Dryzek, 1997; Hopwood et al., 2005; W. Sachs, 1999; Sneddon, Howarth, & Norgaard, 2006). Coinciding with the rise of the Washington Consensus in the 1980s, this interest for critical engagements with economic growth and development paradigms faded during the last two decades of the twentieth century, but revived with the turn of the new one (Kallis et al. 2014). This section sets out to reconstruct the context and dynamics that enabled or fostered such revival at a site where it developed into a particularly vibrant debate: Germany.

At the turn of the first decade of the century, the idea of a *social-ecological transformation* or *Great Transformation* emerged as an umbrella concept seeking to integrate these discussions into a systemic social-ecological picture, and generated a momentous and extensive debate spanning across social fields and institutions in Germany (Brand, 2012a, 2016c; Brand, Pühl, & Thimmel, 2013; Deutscher Bundestag, 2013; Diefenbacher et al., 2014; Homer-Dixon, 2009; Leggewie & Welzer, 2010; W. Sachs, 2013; Vereinte Dienstleistungsgewerkschaft, 2011; von Jorck, 2013b; WBGU, 2011).

The debate first took off in the expert domain, with a decisive impulse being provided by two major events at the interface between the spheres of politics and science: one of them was the publication of the 2011 flagship report "World in transition: A social Contract for the Great Transformation" by the German Advisory Council on Global Change *(Wissenschaftlicher Beirat Globaler Umweltveränderungen,* short WBGU) (cf. Chapter 3), an official consulting body of the federal government. This report was meant as the German contribution to the Rio+20 Earth Summit, but ended up having far greater impact at home than it did internationally. Indeed, there is broad consensus in acknowledging this WBGU-report as a catalyzing event that boosted momentum for a wider socio-political GT debate (Brand, 2014d; W. Sachs, 2013; von Jorck, 2013b), firmly anchoring the topic in diverse agendas and setting the tone of the discussion: the debate on sustainable development is to evolve towards a discourse on a more fundamental and all-encompassing socio-ecological transformation (Reißig, 2014). A wide range of publications on the topic followed in the coming years. (Brand, Pühl, et al., 2013)

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von der Romantik bis zur Gegenwart, as well as his historical background input (2010) to the 2011 WBGU flagship report.

The second catalyzing platform was the 2010-2013 debate held by a national-level parliamentary *Enquete* Commission[136] "Growth, welfare, quality of life" – shortened Enquete-WWL by its German acronym (Brand, 2014b). In the above described context of continued business-as-usual, politization of inequality, growing civilizational risk with the worsening ecological trends, and an international debate on alternative welfare-models, debates at the Enquete-WWL pitted the opposition parties[137], who had originally summoned the Enquete with the purpose of sketching out possible solutions to the multiple-interlinked crisis (Brand, Pühl, et al., 2013; Deutscher Bundestag, 2013; von Jorck, 2013b), against the coalition of ruling parties, who, in turn, shifted the emphasis toward discussing the validity of GDP as an indicator of human development and subjective life satisfaction (Deutscher Bundestag, 2010), following into the steps of similar efforts in other countries[138].

Following this double impulse, the GT debate spread wide open, overflowing the expert domain and connecting with debates and struggles in multiple spheres. Hence there arises the need to explore

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[136] Enquete-commissions (from the French *enquête*: 'inquiry') are inter-fractional working groups set up by the German Bundestag or by a Bundesland parliament to address long-term issues involving diverse juridical, economic, social, or ethical aspects. The Enquete-commissions should reach a consensual position on these questions. The objective is to arrive at a solution that would be supported by a majority of the population, even by those who do not feel represented by the ruling coalition.

[137] At the time, the opposition block was formed by the Social Democrats (SPD), the German Greens (*Bündnis 90/ Die Grünen*), and the democratic socialist party (*Die Linke*), while the government coalition was formed by the sister parties of the Christian Democrats (CDU and CSU), and the liberals (FDP). By the end of 2013, FDP had lost its congressional representation, and SPD formed a 'Great Coalition' with CDU/CSU, changing the board of political allegiances and therefore also the prevalent discourse, particularly within SPD.

[138] The debate on GDP is acknowledged by the WBGU as an indicator of changing values (WBGU, 2011, p. 74). A discussion which, initially, was led in society's 'ecological niches' has become a matter of concern for governments and the EU Commission: since 2007, various initiatives for measuring national welfare and social progress have been pioneered by the United Nations, the OECD (Istanbul World Forum 'Measuring and Fostering the Progress of Societies'), the European Community (Beyond GDP) and Eurostat, and, most recently, by the French (Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi-Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress) (J. Stiglitz, Sen, & Fitoussi, 2009) and by the UK governments (Jackson, 2009a). The debate on alternatives to GDP as an indicator is hardly a recent one, however: Since the 1970s, and the Club of Rome's study on 'The Limits to Growth' (D. H. Meadows, Meadows, Randers, & Behrens, 1972), there has been continued scientific and political discussions on how to adequately measure welfare, human development, social progress and natural environmental changes.

developments in diverse arenas that constitute breeding grounds for the GT's discursive production, as well as how (and in how far) they relate to each other. For example, the scientific sphere intersects with politics in the form of think tanks with a policy-consulting function, and sometimes also with civil society organizations in experimental spaces seeking a "democratization of science" (Beck, 1992; Funtowicz & Ravetz, 1991; Gallopin et al., 2001), or merging with grassroots activism, as in the Degrowth movement (see Excursus at the end of this section). Although the latter develops largely in parallel to mainstream politics, growth-critical approaches are incipiently finding resonance, as we will see, within political debates in the larger public sphere. Meanwhile, special interest groups such as trade unions (TUs), employers' unions, or business chambers develop their own visions and proposals for a GT, with TUs, especially, exhibiting surprising crossovers and overlapping with unlikely partners. Given that the focus of this research is on agency, these arenas of discursive production were constructed analytically as agent-centered categories. Five broad agent-arenas have been identified inductively from the data: 1) the sphere of long-term politics and the sustainable development policy-domain; 2) the arena of institutionalized civil society organizations (with environmental, developmental, and religious NGOs and think tanks with a public-interest agenda playing a central role); 3) the spheres of social movement organizations (SMOs), grassroots' initiatives and niches of alternative practice; 4) the sphere of special interest groups, which gathers, for example, trade-union and business actors, as well as think tanks with a particularistic agenda; and, lastly, 5) the sphere of science and politics of science. The concrete sites or *loci* where these debates unfold range from physical (conferences, *fora*, institutionalized political debates) to virtual discussion platforms – the latter seemingly becoming more prominent the lesser formalized the group-arrangements are. The *media* through which debates unfold range from live discussion to print media –mainly dissemination and so-called 'grey' literature, application-oriented research, and also through academic publications and, occasionally, certain mass media.

Let us now zoom into contextual developments within particular arenas of discourse production, in order to get a grasp of situational, material, and agential elements at play, as well as how the diverse arenas interact (or not) with each other. These dimensions are then systematically analyzed in the second part of this chapter (Section 4.3) through the lens of dramaturgical analysis.

<u>Political and SD policy- sphere</u>

In international policy arena, macro-narratives of transition flourished in the years following immediately after the financial meltdown of 2008, partly drawing on conceptual and theoretical developments in sustainability-related sciences, such as the Dutch school of Transition Research, albeit with a heavily technocratic and sub-systemic approach[139]. First, the different versions of a *Green New Deal* appeared with the common aim of guaranteeing both a quick recovery of the economy and taking advantage of the historical momentum to push for a larger transformation of the economy towards green energy and technologies. These policy frameworks and packages were thus framed as win–win type of solutions (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, 2008; UN DESA, 2009; UNEP/PNUMA, 2009). Later, in the wake of the Rio+20 Conference in 2012, the idea of a 'Green New Deal' was superseded by broader narratives such as 'Green growth' (OECD, 2011) and the 'Green Economy' (UNEP, 2012) (cf. Chapter 3). Though increasingly popular in civil society circles, more radical proposals such as the 'Great Transition' (New Economics Foundation, 2009; Raskin, 2008; Smart CSOs Initiative, 2011) addressing a broader scope of problems and raising foundational questions about issues such as economic growth, the environmentally and socially destructive character of (neoliberal) globalization, and the regulative role of markets, found less reception in political agendas[140]. Hence the adoption of the term 'transformation' in this sphere did not alter the discursive balance in the field of SD, but rather had, by and large, mere rhetorical impact.[141]

In Germany, however, the idea of a 'Great Transformation' or 'social-ecological transformation', as conveyed in the reports of the already mentioned German Advisory Council on Global Change

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[139] Transition research theories work under the assumption that changes in one societal sub-system would trigger changes in other sub-systems, and thus, as a consequence, of the system as a whole (Grin et al. 2010, p. 4, cited in Diefenbacher et al., 2014)

[140] Some of their insights, however, have permeated policy processes, both at the local and at the international level. In the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals 2015-process (SDGs), for example, views highlighting inequality as a barrier to global prosperity in harmony with nature, and acknowledging that "it was a mistake to make economic growth the decisive criterion for successfully combating poverty and pursuing sustainable development" had made their way into first-round drafts; yet eventually the recommendations of the international experts put forward "a strategy of cosmetic corrections of course to the present resource-intensive economic model rather than a radical departure from the growth-dogma and a turn towards the concept of the global common good" (Schilder, 2013, p. 22).

[141] For a critical inquiry into the swift career of "transformation" as a concept in German development and environmental discussions, see (Brand, 2016c); into its technocratic appropriations at the global level (Stirling, 2015)

(WBGU, 2011, 2014, 2016), triggered a wider and deeper socio-political – or, with Ulrich Beck: *sub-political* – debate. In the wake of the momentum created by the convergence of the discussion strands unleashed by the Enquete WWL and the 2011 WBGU report, Germany's political parties –and the internationally active foundations they support[142]– readily developed their respective interpretative and normative stances towards the multiple crisis and its possible solutions. The most proactive stance was clearly taken by the opposition parties, both *ad intra* the Enquete WWL discussions as well as in the public sphere, which clearly suggests that the debate on a social-ecological transformation was – at least in its beginnings – politically promoted by the opposition as a potentially unifying concept (Brand, Pühl, et al., 2013). A formal conceptual definition by the opposition parties was laid down in a special amendment (*Sondervotum*) to the final report of the Enquete WWL:

> The concept of socio-ecological transformation covers all those strategies which rely on a conscious socio-political design to address the multiple crisis rather than relying first and foremost on the capitalist (global) market that allegedly responds to ecological problems by means of technology and scarcity signals. As indicated in the adjective "socio-ecological", fundamental transformations are required in the economy and in society, as well as in their relation to geological and biophysical life-support systems (Deutscher Bundestag, 2013, p. 484)

The first party to individually voice an official position paper were the Greens (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, 2011), which reframed their earlier *Green New Deal*[143] proposal (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, 2008) as a comprehensive policy-package for a social-ecological transformation. As compared to the 2008 version, whose main focus was the regulation of the financial sector, this new proposal was not only meant to provide immediate and decisive response to the economic crisis, but simultaneously goes beyond the short-term juncture and pave the way towards a low-carbon society through an

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[142] Each of the traditional political parties in Germany has a like-minded foundation which receives support from tax-revenues according to the congressional representation of each force, and function as think tanks, disseminators, and civil society-branches of the respective party, not only in Germany, but worldwide, with national or regional branches. The ones playing a more important role in the GT debate are the Heinrich-Böll Foundation, which is close to the German Greens, and the Rosa-Luxemburg Foundation (*Die Linke*), and, to a lesser degree, the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation (SPD).

[143] The original "Green New Deal" by the German Green Party had been issued as a conjunctural response to the 2008 economic crisis, in consonance other proposals of the kind world-wide. The label "Green New Deal" is in obvious reference to U.S. President Roosevelt's successful Keynesian policy intervention lifting his country out of the Great Depression back in the 1930s.

integrated policy-framework based on three pillars: the regulation of the financial system, a social pillar, and, lastly, a "social-ecological restructuration" *(ökologisch-sozialer Umbau).*

The Social-Democratic Party (SPD) also released in 2011 their framework program "New progress and more democracy". Hereby the SPD goes on to address a critique toward the "old conception of progress", departing from the observation that such 'progress' is no longer translating into welfare for the population (SPD Sozial Demokratische Partei, 2011, p. 3). A new model of progress is thus proposed, one which is based on stronger democratic engagement of the citizenry and is embedded in social and ecological boundaries (SPD Sozial Demokratische Partei, 2011, p. 7). In addition, that same year, the SPD convened the *Fortschrittsforum* ("Progress-Forum"), a two-year dialogue process among 100 experts around the question about the meaning of the good life from a future-oriented perspective, which developed on a parallel track to the work of the Enquete WWL, and published its results in the spring of 2013 (Friedrich Ebert Foundation, 2013a)[144]. A distinctive topical contribution from this forum to the GT debate was the question of the status and characteristics of work –both gainful productive employment as well as reproductive, unpaid 'care'-work– in current and in a future sustainable society (Friedrich Ebert Foundation, 2013b)

Taking the care-perspective heads-on, feminist intellectuals also joined the debate with a critical appreciation of the Enquete WWL report (Biesecker et al., 2012) (cf. Chapter 3) and various spin-off contributions (a.o. Biesecker & Hofmeister, 2014; Muraca, 2014; Winterfeld, 2011). From a feminist perspective, the global social-ecological crisis can be reframed as a crisis of socio-natural reproduction with a large gender-component[145]. The Enquete WWL approach of 'finding the right indicators' largely

[144] Inputs from the SPD-environment came mainly in the form of byproducts of the *Fortschrittsprogramm* and the *Fortschrittsforum*: the documents *So wollen wir leben! Ideen und Handlungsempfehlungen aus dem Fortschrittsforum* („This is how we want to live! Ideas and recommendations from the progress-forum) (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2013a); and *Wie wollen wir leben und arbeiten?* („How we want to live and work?) (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2013b) summarize the visions on the good life and the good work discussed in these for a.

[145] The "crisis of (re)production" is the basic conceptual and theoretical axis of the feminist contribution to the GT debate. It adds a layer of complexity to the understanding of the multiple crisis. Basic tenets are, on the one hand, that a capitalist economy not only externalizes operative costs through exploiting the environment and the workforce, but also by drawing on non-market-based (re)productive activities that are, in turn, a condition of possibility for its very existence. The incorporation of women into the labor market has only led to a „double burden" that is dealt with locally through transnational care-supply chains, adding yet another level of precariousness to the working class through the establishment of a new "double-earner household" model (see Biesecker & Hofmeister, 2014).

misses the point: exclusions and externalizations discussed in the GT debate cannot be solved by simple measures of inclusion, appreciation, or internalization, as any single one-point measure (same as any single indicator) necessarily miss critical interconnectedness of the various issues at stake in the multiple crisis. A social-ecological transformation away from profit- and growth-driven political imperatives would thus be the only consistent pathway out of the crisis.

In the same line, the democratic socialist party *Die Linke* presented its "Plan B: Red project for the social-ecological restructuration"[146] in 2012 (*Fraktion Die Linke im Deutschen Bundestag*, 2012). In the circle of influence of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Foundation –the foundation supported by *Die Linke*- transformation strategies are discussed from a capitalism-critical standpoint (Brangsch & et al., 2012; Dellheim & Krause, 2008). The focus of this discourse lies with the democratization of society and of the economy, emphasizing the 'how' of the transition, which is framed around three main concepts: climate justice; just transition; and Degrowth (Kaufmann & Müller, 2009, p. 193). In addition, the social-ecological transformation is framed as a transition towards a 'Green Socialism' (Adler & Schachtschneider, 2010; Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, 2012).

The political discourse around a GT continued developing over the following years, as witnessed by key publications influencing the debate from the respective party-positions: anthologies such as *Futuring: Perspectives of a transformation within capitalism and beyond* (Brie, 2014) develop the capitalist- and growth-critical argument akin to *Die Linke* and the Rosa-Luxemburg Foundation; while the Green Party and the Heinrich-Böll Foundation developed their discourse around the axes of a Green Market Economy and 'smart growth' (Andreae, 2012; Fücks, 2013), which resonates internationally with the discourses of Green Growth (OECD) and the Green Economy (UNEP), both of which have had significant impact on the German debate. In particular, the book *Intelligent Wachsen: die Grüne Revolution* ("Growing smartly: the green revolution") by Ralf Fücks (2013) speaks out in favor of the continued pursuit of economic growth, albeit a selective one (cf. Chapter 3). The more 'radical' faction[147] of the

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[146] In German *"Plan B: das rote Projekt für den sozial-ökologischen Umbau"*. The debate on an alternative to the Green New Deal had been developing already by 2009 under the label *social-ecological transformation* (see for example Wolf, 2009). "Plan B", which in 2016 started a 2.0 project-phase, stands out as arguably the most elaborated policy-program for a SET at the party-level in the German political sphere.

[147] It should be noted that the German Greens, both at party-level and at the Heinrich-Böll Foundation, are divided into two strands representing intermediate positions alongside the black-red continuum, with those leaning more toward the status quo (the so-called 'Realos') being dominant at

Heinrich-Böll Foundation, however, aligns itself with the discursive strands of the center-left of the political spectrum, calling for fundamental societal transformation and for overcoming the growth imperative. (Unmüßig, Sachs, & Fatheuer, 2012)

In June 2013, the Enquete WWL issued their final report. Despite the fact that the supposed mission of this Enquete commission was interrogating the problematic relationship between economic growth and welfare/quality of life (Reuter, 2013), a fracture between the ruling coalition and the opposition along the topical lines of the "status of growth in economy and society"[148] signed debates throughout, and becomes apparent in the final report. Delegates and experts from the ruling coalition of Christian-Democrats (CDU/CSU) and liberals (FDP) further relied on a growth-based definition of welfare (e.g. Paqué, 2010) and on a continuation of the political-economic model of strengthening national international competitiveness as precondition (Reuter, 2013), whereas the opposition (social-democrats/SPD, Greens, and the *Die Linke*) emphasized the need for a social-ecological transformation of a Polanyian scale as a precondition to achieve sustainable welfare for all within ecological limits (see for example Deutscher Bundestag, 2013, p. 128). Yet also within the ruling coalition a fracture became exposed: neoclassical-neoliberals, 'business as usual' advocates showed divergences with part of the conservative factions[149] in the ruling coalition who acknowledge the interlinked and multidimensional character of the crisis and the need for fundamental transformations. (Brand, Pühl, et al., 2013)

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present. The *Green New Deal* can therefore be assumed to represent more faithfully the position and worldview of this strand, while the more radical Greens ('Fundis') embody a discourse critical of eco-modernist positions (see for example Unmüßig, Sachs, & Fatheuer, 2012). For background information on the cleavage between the more radical faction (known as "Fundis") and the 'realists' ("Realos") within the German Greens see: https://www.gruene.de/partei/30-gruene-jahre-30-gruene-geschichten/30-gruene-jahre-8-realos-und-fundis.html

[148] See report of Project Group 1 "Status of Growth in Economy and Society" and related *Sondervoten* of the opposition, as well as Working Group 4 on "sustainability-oriented regulatory policy", particularly *on the decoupling of growth, welfare, and resource consumption*.

[149] With his widely disseminated book "Exit. Welfare without growth" (Miegel 2010), and an active engagement through public writing and interviews, as well as through his think-thank Denkwerk Zukunft, Meinhard Miegel, CDU/CSU expert consultant to the Enquete WWL, rises as main representative of a conservative, anti-growth transformation discourse.

Despite the above fractures, significant acknowledgements regarding hot topics were also achieved across the party-spectrum. These include convergent assessment about the difficulty of overcoming rebound-effects[150] in efficiency-based approaches to environmental policy (Project-group 3) or about some implications of downward trends in growth-rates, as well as constructive debates on feminist contributions to an extended conception of work, or else on the critique of extractivism and resource-intensive lifestyles. In regard to the topic "consumption", the final report of Project Group 5 explicitly states that techno-fixes will not suffice and need to be complemented through behavioral change, sufficiency-approaches and civil society innovations (Kuhnhenn, 2013). Among the opposition parties there was further agreement on following points: a) GDP no being an adequate measure for welfare nor a suitable objective for contemporary economy; b) the multiple-interlinked crisis can only be addressed through a GT beyond growth and market-regulation; c) need to decouple the concept of welfare from resource-consumption. (Brand, Pühl, et al., 2013)

Although the Enquete WWL was widely regarded as a political failure, it did arguably boost the momentum for a larger debate around a social-ecological transformation. Furthermore, it also introduced a dialogue around the good life in German politics. In December 2013, the SPD allied with CDU/CSU forming a 'Great Coalition'. Themes like welfare, life satisfaction and good life beyond economic performance are acknowledged in the in the new government strategy *Gut Leben in Deutschland* ("Good Living in Germany"), which was agreed upon in the coalition contract (Reisch & Bietz, 2014, p. 16). This led to a first attempt at a *Zukunftsdialog "gut leben in Deutschland"* ('futuring-dialogue' on the good life in Germany), which was largely regarded as a failure and re-edited in 2015. However, the opposition parties having taken up the banner of the 'Great Transformation' as their own at the Enquete- WWL, it should come as no surprise that CDU/CSU and FDP are hardly involved in this debate, at least at party-wide level. This became evident with the widely promoted *Zukunftscharta* consultation and resulting document (BMZ Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung, 2014), an initiative by the Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) under CSU Minister Gerd Müller, which was conceived of as Germany's official input to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). The *Zukunftscharta* barely refers to the GT debate, although some of its points can be arguably traced back to GT-language. The merger of the 'transformation' and 'green economy' rhetoric is also evident at policy-processes related to the 2015-

[150] For a broader address of the issue of rebound-effects or Jevon's paradox, see Chapter 3, Section XX

established Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations[151]. The subsequent fading of the GT debate in the formal political scene was inversely proportional to its up-taking in other spheres of socio-political debate, which will be reviewed in the following sections.

More promising than this declarative instances, however, are a handful of policy initiatives, which were mentioned in Chapter 3: drawing on the debate around welfare and the feminist-inspired care-crisis or "crisis of reproduction", reduced working-time *(Arbeitsverkürzung)*, and a Universal Basic Income (UBI), and, more generally, the rise of a *politics of time* in Germany (Reisch & Bietz, 2014) are arenas and initiatives with socio-ecological transformative potential insofar they deal with balancing of gainful employment versus unpaid care-work, working time versus civic engagement or family-time, material welfare versus qualitative welfare with a stronger appreciation of so-called 'time-prosperity' *(Zeitwohlstand)*, and with a re-balancing of gender-specific roles, among other tensions inbuilt into Western modern lifestyles, mainly in affluent societies. Also the policy-package in Plan B (now in its version 2.0) from *Die Linke* is worth mentioning, including proposals for free public transport in cities, energy democracy, re-localized circular economies, and strengthened popular participation in politics and the economy.

Especially significant mentioning, in this context, is the public and political momentum of an iconic national utopia with arguably ambivalent effects vis-à-vis the GT debate: The German *Energiewende* (i.e. the nation-wide 'Energy Transition' to renewables). The *Energiewende* initiative is older and has different sources than the GT debate: its origins can be traced back to the context of the anti-nuclear movements in the early 1980s with a leading blueprinting-role of the Öko-Institut, but it was only the accident in the Japanese nuclear power plant of Fukushima in 2011 that prompted the ruling coalition under the leadership of Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel to give an official seal of approval to the initiative, which aims at completely phasing out nuclear power plants by 2022. That *Energiewende* provides a favorable back wind of "utopian realism" to the GT debate is arguably beyond question. Furthermore, it may serve as a concrete project with catalyzing potential for "transformative agents" to coalesce around, thus building a basis for deeper and more comprehensive cooperation and discursive coalition (Reißig, 2014); particularly when, together with the current Chinese 5-year plan, it

[151] E.g. the *Bonn Conference on Global Transformation* in May 2015 was intended to kick-start a bi-yearly conference series designed as milestones alongside the SDGs implementation process. This conference was co-organized by the state of Nordreihn-Westfalen and by GIZ, the largest German development agency (Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) & Landesregierung Nordreihn-Westfalen, 2015).

is the only encompassing initiative of transition toward low-carbon energy systems worldwide (Germanwatch, 2012, p. 8). Yet, on the other hand, the *Energiewende* does not address, per se, any of the critiques towards economic growth (in particular, the rebound effects) and towards the crisis-prone character of the capitalist mode of accumulation that are characteristic of most GT-narratives, as we saw in Chapter 3. Social justice-dimensions are given marginal consideration (Kopatz, 2013), even less so the arguably greatest transformative potential of the *Energiewende*: the decentralized 'prosumption' of energy (Rifkin, 2014). Whether it will become a catalyst and docking slot for the GT debate into the mainstream policy- and political spheres, or rather dilute into a 'green growth' approach leaning toward the status quo remains to be seen.

Civil society:

Three particular developments at the interface of institutionalized CSOs and grassroots movement and SMOs are worth mentioning as creating momentum for the GT debate in Germany: First, Ulrich Brand identifies the grassroots mobilization against the G8 summit in Heiligendamm (2007) as prelude to a strong re-politization momentum, serving as a bridge between 'old' and 'new' generations of radical activists, plus left parties and part of tradeunionism. Secondly, the five McPlanet.com congresses held alternatively in Berlin and Hamburg between 2003 and 2012 showcase the merger of globalization critique and socio-ecological themes (Brand, 2014a). McPlanet.com was organized jointly by alter-globalist, environmental, development, and religious NGOs and SMOs, including Attac, *Brot für die Welt* (Bread for the World), BUND (the biggest German environmental NGO), the protestant development service EED, Greenpeace, and the Heinrich-Böll-Foundation. Thirdly, the COP 15 to the UNFCC in Copenhagen (2009) can be seen as another catalyzing moment in civil society circles creating momentum for the GT debate. This was when trade unions presented themselves at the international level as standard-bearers of a "just transition", thereby expressing the will of and demanding getting involved in the design process of a societal transition (Brand, 2014d, p. 252). In Germany, it led to the globalization-critical left decidedly taking ownership of the ecological crisis (Brand, 2014a).

Meanwhile, initiatives and niches of alternative practice[152] have begun to cluster, organize and become politically active, spreading internationally and becoming a global source of discourse production

[152] Alternative practices include citizen initiatives experimenting with new lifestyles for self-production (prosumers), shared utilization (commonists), reparation (the 'Repair Revolution'), and long-lived

about a social-ecological transformation (von Jorck, 2014, p. 26). The most prominent example of niche experiments with community-based responses to the great challenges of the Anthropocene is probably the Transition Towns Network[153], with more than 1000 initiatives registered in over 40 countries by 2013.

Significant developments with relevance to the GT debate also took place at the interface of civil society and science. Here the most significant development of the last 10 years in Europe has arguably been the rise of the *Décroissance* or Degrowth movement, as the most important impulse revitalizing the debate on ecological and social limits to economic expansion. Degrowth became "both a banner associated with social and environmental movements and an emergent concept in academic and intellectual circles, [which] are interdependent and affect each other" (Martinez Alier et al. 2010, cited in Asara et al., 2015, p. 3). Because of its standalone entity and its catalyzing force within the GT debate, the Degrowth movement will be addressed separately in an Excursus at the end of section 4.2.

The following sub-sections will describe developments and agents in the sphere of CS in more detail, focusing on the most momentous timeframe of the GT debate, starting 2010.

Grassroots movements, environmental, developmental and religious NGOs, associations & think tanks

Docking with the above described debate at the level of political parties and their foundations in the wake of the Enquete-WWL and the 2011 WBGU report, a multitude of think-tanks[154], social movement organizations (SMOs) such as the alterglobalization-forerunner *Attac*, and Development & Environment NGOs – BUND, *Misereor,* Bread for the World, among many others – stepped in early co-shaping the GT debate with own elaborations and proposals, often in cooperation with political foundations and think tanks. Here again the critique of the dominant economic model and world-order plays a central role, with a particular focus on the economic growth-fixation of politics,

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design; urban-gardening; etc. See Escobar (2013) for an illustrative survey of transition initiatives worldwide.

[153] Initiated in 2005 by British permaculture educator Rob Hopkins, Transition Towns is a model of community-organization that has been linking disperse initiatives, seeking to build locally rooted yet networked structures of resilience in the face of the energy climate, economic, and food crisis. See: https://transitionnetwork.org/about-the-movement/what-is-transition/history/

[154] The Institut Solidarische Moderne (ISM) (Institut Solidarische Moderne, 2011), Denkwerk Demokratie (Mikfeld, 2012), Denkwerk Zukunft (Denkwerk Zufunft, 2008, n.d.; Zimmer, 2013), and the Foundation Mercator count amongst the most influential

as can be concluded from publications such as *Ausgewachsen!* ("Outgrown!") (Rätz, 2012) or *Postwachstum* ("Post-growth")(Schmelzer & Passadakis, 2011); as well as in conferences and congresses, such as the 2011 Attac-congress *Jenseits des Wachstums*[155] ('Beyond growth'), which had broad resonance in national mass media and played a decisive role in establishing the degrowth debate in Germany (Brand, 2014a). This congress was co-organized with the Friedrich Ebert, Heinrich-Böll, Rosa Luxemburg, and Otto Brenner foundations, as well as organizations from the media: the newspaper *Taz die Tageszeitung* and the well-established monthly magazine of political analysis *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik*.[156]

Particularly noteworthy is also the widespread study by the Wuppertal Institute, BUND, and Bread for the World: *Zukunftfähiges Deutschland*[157] (Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland, Brot für die Welt, & Wuppertal Instituts für Klima, Umwelt, Energie, 2008). This study updates the homonymous and highly influential 1996 Report (Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland, Misereor, & Wuppertal-Institut für Klima, 1996): while the original report was concerned with discussing the prospects for sustainable development on the basis of the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio, this new document takes issue with what it deems the flawed responses of German official politics to the emerging economic crisis, advocating for a fundamental re-thinking of socio-economic structures and patterns in Germany from a global perspective (Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland et al., 2008). Furthermore, the 2009 version makes the growth critique more central than the 1996 version, which had merely argued for the need to look beyond economic growth without deeming it outrightly incompatible with ecological limits. Problematized are also the primacy of markets over the political, the current division of labor (both nationally and internationally), the importance of the commons and the regional economies; and the effects of global trade expansionism, as well as the current distribution of benefits in global value chains.

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[155] *Jenseits: des Wachstums. Ökologische Gerechtigkeit. Soziale Rechte. Gutes Leben* ("Beyond growth: Ecological justice. Social rights. Good life")

[156] These two media organizations proved of particular importance in spreading, amplifying, and providing a critical platform for the debates on GT. See for example in *Blätter* issues 05/2008 ("*Klimakrise*") and 12/2011 *("Wie das Wachstum in die Köpfe kam*"), both by H. Welzer; or else issue 10/2014, with an article by Jürgen Trittin on the Coalition for a GT and its challenges.

[157] *Zukunftfähiges Deutschland in einer globalisierten Welt. Ein Anstoß zur gesellschaftlichen Debatte* („Sustainable Germany in a globalized world. An impulse for social debate")

The role of religious communities, movements and organizations in building a transformation discourse emphasizing climate protection and social and environmental justice which closely aligns with the corresponding global movements[158] is highlighted by diverse observers of the GT debate (a.o. Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014; WBGU, 2014). By way of illustration, the three-year project "*Weltgemeinwohl:* Development in the service of the global welfare" (2012-2015) by *Misereor* and the *Institut für Gesellschaftspolitik* in Munich (Misereor & IHS, 2013), follows in the steps of *Zukunftfähiges Deutschland*, but is more global in scope and more intercultural in its tone, explicitly bringing in a global South and a religious-motivated perspective to the analysis of the orientations of German politics, economy, and society. A second interesting example, because of the unusual cooperation between trade-unionism, religious and environmental organizations it featured (Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014, p. 144), is the "Transformation Congress" (*Transformationskongress*), which was held in June 2012 in Berlin under the motto "Acting sustainably. Redesigning the economy. Strengthening democracy", with nearly 900 attendees. This congress was organized by the German Association of Trade Unions (*Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund* / DGB), Bread for the World with two academic organizations representing the German Protestant church[159], and the German Circle for the Protection of Nature (*Deutscher Naturschutzring* / DNR), together with nine project-partners, including other Protestant religious organizations, BUND, Misereor, and Friends of the Earth Germany, and other 14 supporters, among which the Wuppertal Institute. Likewise, discursive development within religious groups and organizations reflect a growing concern with the multiple crisis and the need for a fundamental transformation of society. The most notable event is arguably the rise to prominence of the 2013-elected Pope Francis in the global SD debate. After the publication of his ground-breaking Encyclical *Laudato Si'* in 2015, the so-called 'green Pope' Francis was widely acclaimed as an ally by activist groups in the GT debate, particularly as the transformative counterpoint to the much more conventional outlook of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which were agreed upon that same year. In the same vein, the thematic foci of the latest Protestant Synods in Germany (*Evangelischer Kirchentag*)[160] were largely tailored to discursive atmosphere of the GT debate: For

[158] For an overview of the international Environmental Justice and Climate Justice movements, see Martinez-Alier (2014)

[159] Research campus of the evangelical student community (*Forschungsstäatte der Evangelischen Studiengemeinschaft* /FEST) and the Social Science Institute (SI) of the EKD.

[160] Larger public fora with a futuring-agenda (e.g. Kirchentag, Katholikentag – Kirchentag every two years with somewhat 100 thousand visitors) (Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014, p. 142).

example, the 2008 *Kirchentag's* main theme was 'Changing Climate – Changing Waters – Changing Lives'. In 2013, the slogan was "As much as you need", which resonates with the debate over the non-material dimensions of the Good Life in society at large; and the 2014 synod carried the title 'World Food Security and Sustainable Agriculture'. (WBGU, 2014, p. 89)

The above drivers are complemented with a more cultural type of activism, which places lesser emphasis on structural conditions and more on the inspirational potential of real-lived examples of alternative, sustainable forms of engaging with the world. Exemplary of this kind of engagement is "Futureperfect", a joint project of Herald Welzer's Foundation *Futur Zwei* and the well-known Goethe-Institute. Its goal is the widespread diffusion of 'transformation narratives' underpinning real-life stories of a different way of living and organizing economies along the lines of sufficiency and Degrowth through mainstream media, thus reaching well beyond the "usual suspects" and avoiding the circular logic of "preaching to the already converted"[161].

Approaches like the ones described above clearly deviate from the usual fragmented, short-term, and pragmatic approaches of mainstream activism and philanthropy, reason for which while many advocate for the emergence of a "new activism" or "systemic activism" (Narberhaus, 2013; Raskin, 2010; WBGU, 2014); some would argue that we are in fact witnessing such emergence[162]. Showcasing examples for emergent "systemic movements" in the global North are the Commons movement, the Degrowth movement, the Solidarity-Economy movement[163], the P2P movement, or else the intersectional feminist movement (Narberhaus & Sheppard, 2015). At the level of institutionalized NGO-activism, a systemic outlook was also adopted at the NGO International Conference "Dialogue on Transformation" organized jointly by the development NGO Germanwatch and US-partner IATP in November 2012, in Bonn. The conference was conceived as a national and international dialogue- and strategy-building process, as a starting point to overcome geographical and thematic borders in

[161] http://www.goethe.de/ins/cz/prj/fup/ueb/deindex.htm

[162] See for example. http://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2015/aug/24/protest-movement-failings-i-dont-believe-in-it-anymore?CMP

[163] At the congress "Solidarity Economy" (Solikon) in September 2015 in Berlin, which was the biggest grassroots event since the Leipzig Degrowth conference in 2014, with 1000 participants representing ca. 25 international social movements, the idea of 'convergence' of the distinct social struggles was also the key concept around which discussions on 'common welfare economics' *(Gemeinwohlökonomie)*. Commons, fair trade, Transition Towns and feminist perspectives were conducted. This shows a growing awareness and interest at the grassroots level to think in terms of a 'systemic actvism'.

order to discuss a fundamental shift of the global society – a Great Transformation (Germanwatch, 2012). On a day-to-day level, notorious innovations include the rapid spread of 'social learning labs' as a novel institutional arrangement better suited for coping with complex challenges (Hassan, 2014). A case in point is the Smart CSOs Lab, which offers an interaction- and learning-platform for activists and researchers aimed at developing strategies for 'systemic change' through the self-transformation of civil society organizations (short: CSOs). The Smart CSOs Lab engages 'change agents' from both small and large organizations, as well as from organizational networks in the development and sustainability sectors, such as CONCORD, the *European* NGO Confederation for Relief and Development, and CIDSE, an international alliance of 17 Catholic development agencies.

The above examples are, of course, purposefully chosen to shed light on the agents, arenas, events, and processes that showcase discursive shifts and learning-platforms advocating a social-ecological transformation. This does not amount to saying that 'transformative learning' is widespread among civil society agents in Germany or beyond: Indeed, evidence to the contrary can be observed unfolding in parallel: self-preservation drives and a bias towards issue-silos, short-term pragmatism, and advocacy of shallow 'achievable' policy-goals are still prevalent among CSOs, due to reasons ranging from a pragmatic outlook to pressures on the side of funders (Narberhaus & Sheppard, 2015). In addition, a continued disconnection from their grassroots base raises the question of whose interests NGOs are actually representing (Felder & et. al, 2012, p. 3; Germanwatch, 2012, p. 13). But social movements are not to be regarded as emancipatory per se, either; in fact, the recent widespread emergence of so-called "crisis movements" and demonstrations (della Porta, 2013) or else anti-immigration or islamophobic movements that have spread across the global North over the timespan of this research project attest to the increasingly reactionary character of large parts of the grassroot base when the certainties of a fading (but still taken for granted) world commence to shake.

Special interest groups

In the widespread discourse about 'stakeholder dialogue' all stakeholders are assumed somehow 'equal' in both their aim ('we are all on the same boat') and their power when it comes to deliberative interaction. Instead, a primary analytical distinction is made here between civil society organizations which (can claim to) stand for the defense of the general interest or common good, on the one hand, and those which explicitly pursue a particularistic interest – which they are required to frame their arguments in terms of the contribution they represent to the general interest when participating in

discussions of societal relevance –, such as workers' and employers' associations, business chambers, etc.

In the case of business actors, and despite their central role in 'locking-in unsustainability' – more controversially, also in potentially unlocking it – an organic discussion around their role in (debates around) a "Great Transformation" is in its early infancy. The Institute of Ecological Economics (IÖW), however, produced two insightful studies on the topic of businesses that are not dependent on growth. The first one, in 2013, showcased and reflected on the experience of successful growth-independent companies; and a follow-up 2015 study found that one third of the polled small-and-medium enterprises did not see the need for economic growth at all (Scholl & Mewes, 2015). The emergence of new business models based on longer product life, barter, repairing, sharing and other forms of collaborative economic activity is indeed widely regarded as a marker of future trends: The foresight study by the German Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) regarding societal changes identified barter culture, 'do-it-yourself', a rediscovery of the commons, and consumption-slowdown, as well as redefined notions of social welfare and growth, to become defining societal trends towards 2030 (Zweck & al., 2015)

Noteworthy is the fact that a significant part of the unionized working class have engaged in the debate around the social-ecological transformation, including VER.DI (representing the service sector), IG Metall (steel industry), and IG BCE (chemical, mining, and energy industries) (IG Metall & IG BCE, 2011; Vereinte Dienstleistungsgewerkschaft, 2011), as well as their umbrella organization DGB *(Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund)*. Singularly interesting, in this regard, is the crossover-paper "Social-ecological restructuration as a project of trade unions and social movements"[164] (Felder & et. al, 2012) issued jointly by Attac, VER.DI, and Greenpeace. This alliance is interesting insofar it challenges the widespread view that there exists a necessary conflict of interests between trade unions and environmental groups in the face of the social-ecological crisis; although –to be sure– here the social perspective takes precedence here over the ecological one (von Jorck, 2013a).

The reaction from the side of the employers came through the *Initiative Neue Soziale Marktwirtschaft* (INSM/ Initiative New Social Market Economy), a liberal advocacy think-tank founded in 2000 by the employers' association Gesamtmetall (Schroeder & Wessels, 2010), which outlined six

[164] *Sozial-ökologischer Umbau als Projekt von Gewerkschaften und sozialen Bewegungen*

transformation strategies, all of them oriented toward ‚sustainable growth' (Initiative Neue Soziale Marktwirtschaft, 2012). This strand of argumentation resonates closely with the eco-modernist strand within the Green Party and the Heinrich Böll Foundation (Andreae, 2012; Fücks, 2013), and internationally with the discourses of Green Growth (OECD) and the Green Economy (UNEP).
Political initiatives have also been kick-started from this agent-arena, in collaboration with other civil society partners: the initiative "*Arbeitsverkürzung jetzt!*" ("Shortened working-time –now!")[165], pushed by the *Arbeitsgruppe Alternative Wirtschaftspolitik* –a think tank reuniting intellectuals and tradeunionists, with an explicit socio-critical profile–, Attac Germany, the Rosa-Luxemburg Foundation, and VER.DI, raising interest also from religious organizations (e.g. the catholic workers' movement / KAB), and environmental organizations (e.g. BUND). The initiative explicitly draws on capitalist- and growth-critical views, and invokes arguments from the storyline of the multiple crisis –from the need to further social integration and gender equality to time-political and ecological objectives– in order to justify their proposals. One widely discussed policy-proposal is *"Kurze Vollzeit für alle"* ("shortened full-time jobs for everyone"), which seeks to legally reduce the current 40-hour to a 30-hour working week while maintaining full salaries. This initiative is set to consider interdependencies between growth, jobs, happiness and sustainability (Reisch & Bietz, 2014), and enjoys widespread support from the population and even among conservative politicians, in view of glim prospects of sustaining high rates of economic growth in the future, on the one hand, and the likely drastic and structural shrinking of the job market as a result of 'smart factories' and the rise of artificial intelligence (AI), as we saw in Chapter 3. Other policy proposals such as a raise in the legal minimum wage and an unconditional universal basic income (UBI) are often debated in combination with worktime reduction.

Intellectual sphere and politics of science:

Special consideration is owed to the role of the scientific sphere in both fueling the GT debate and lending it visibility, through both substantial input and advocacy. As was the case with civil society actors, in some academic and intellectual circles the GT debate existed before its mainstreaming in 2010. (i.a. Adler & Schachtschneider, 2010; Homer-Dixon, 2009; Leggewie & Welzer, 2010). Furthermore, intellectuals have been pivotal and standard-bearers in bringing the GT debate to the wider socio-political stage and promoting "transformative literacy" (Schneidewind, 2013a).

[165] The initiative started as a result of the conference „*Wege zur Überwindung der Massenarbeitslosigkeit. Arbeitsverkürzung auf die Tagesornung?!*" (Hannover, 30.6-01.7 2011). For more information on the initiative see www.arbeitszeitverckuerzung-jetzt.de

Transformation emerged as a focal point of research and policy-consultancy in diverse scholarly spheres. Apart from relatively well-established academic *milieus* such as time-research, consumer-research, happiness-research, "well-being"-research, and environmental research, which were already mentioned, it is the emerging, inter- and trans-disciplinary fields of Transformation Research, Transition Research & Management, and Sustainability Science or Earth System Science that are at forefront of the debate on a social-ecological transformation within the sphere of science. The development of a social-ecological research agenda and infrastructure is part of a broad discourse about the transformation of the science-system itself, dating back at least to the turn of the century (Ecornet, 2012; WBGU, 2014, p. 104), the debate heating up particularly from the early 2010s in both the natural and the social sciences[166], with the emergence or upscaling of international and inter-disciplinary research organizations and programs on 'transformation'. Paradoxically, given the socio-structural roots of the phenomenon of global environmental change, the social sciences –setting aside Environmental Economics (an application of neoclassical economic analysis) and critical interdisciplinary endeavors such as Political Ecology and Ecological Economics– have been latecomers to the sustainable development debate (Beck, 2010; Biermann, 2010; Chakrabarty, 2009; Latour, 2010; Szerszynski & Urry, 2010). Recently, however, signs of stronger involvement of the social sciences in global sustainability research have appeared alongside the axes of *transition theories* (Geels, 2002; Geels & Schot, 2007; Grin, Rotmans, & Schot, 2010), *Earth System governance* (e.g. Biermann, 2011b; Biermann et al., 2012; Calame, 2012), and more recently the transdisciplinary agenda of *transformation research* (Gell-Mann, 2010; Hackmann & Moser, 2013c; Hackmann & St. Claire, 2012; Westley, 2014) and –particularly in Germany- *transformative science*[167] (Grunwald, 2015; Schneidewind, 2013a, 2013b; WBGU, 2011), which can be characterized as a transdisciplinary (encompassing both the natural and the human sciences) and participatory trend in the politics of science towards a more direct implication of scholarly work in fostering a social-ecological transformation. This double program of 'transformation research' and 'transformative science' can be understood as a

[166] For a good overview, see (O'Brien, 2012).

[167] The transformative science agenda thus takes up the tread developed earlier under the label of *postnormal science* (Funtowicz & Ravetz, 1991, 1993; Gallopin, Funtowicz, O'Connor, & Ravetz, 2001; Ravetz, 2006), and is characterized by its explicit, normative commitment to performatively influencing transition processes.

radicalization of the transdisciplinary field of social-ecological research *(sozial-ökologische Forschung/ SÖF*[168]), closely binding descriptive, normative, and intervention processes together, yielding new insights for both science and social praxis. While research constellations spanning across disciplines and science sectors continue to face big substantial and institutional obstacles (Ecornet, 2012), this approach is subject of a vivid debate[169] and has had incipient but notorious impact in scholarly research, funding, and institutional development programs. At the international level, a noteworthy case in point is the launching of "Future Earth" initiative by UNESCO, the United Nations University (UNU), the International Social Science Council (ISSC), and the International Council for Science (ICSU). While the field of sustainability research is still heavily dominated by the natural sciences (Biermann, 2010), Future Earth grants a more significant role to interdisciplinary research with the social sciences[170] as its predecessor, the Earth System Science Partnership (Hackmann, 2014). In

[168] The Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) –drawing on a framework-concept developed within an initiative of Ökoforum, an association of non-university, non-for-profit research institutes led by the *Institut für Sozial-Ökologische Forschung* (ISOE) in cooperation with BMBF (Ecornet, 2012, p. 5)– had already institutionalized such a shift in research-focus: within the framework program "Research for sustainable development" (FONA), the scientific field of "social-ecological research" *(Sozial-ökologische Forschung/ SÖF)* has been established as a priority area since 2000, and has helped develop a field hitherto dominated by the natural and technological sciences into a more transdisciplinary one. In 2012 a conference aimed at the further development of this focal point SÖF took place, the output of which was the Memorandum *"Verstehen - Bewerten- gestalten. Transdisziplinäres Wissen für eine nachhaltige Gesellschaft"* (BMBF, 2012), which committed over 1000 scientists who signed the memorandum to ensuring that the socio-ecological research in the coming years is consistently deepened and widened –content-wise, organizationally and institutionally–, and was handed over to the Ministry of Education and Research in the autumn of 2012. This effort can be assimilated to akin international processes in the politics of science, such as those reflected in the publications *Grand Challenges of Global Sustainability Research* by the International Council for Science (ICSU, 2010), and the *Transformative Cornerstones* framework by the International Social Science Council (ISSC) (Hackmann & St. Claire, 2012). Both publications outline the key contributions the social sciences can and should make to global environmental change research.

[169] See for example the discussion between the president of the German Research Foundation *(Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschft/ DFG)*, Peter Strohschneider, and Armin Grunwald, professor at the Karslruher Institute for Technology/ KIT (Grunwald, 2015)

[170] The 2016 appointment of former ISSC Director Heide Hackmann as ICSU Director – the first time ever a social scientist presides over the International Council for Science –, can be seen as indicative of this trend. Key publications opening up space for the social sciences in this field are the "Transformative cornerstones of social science research on Global Change" (Hackmann & St. Claire, 2012); and the World Social Science Report 2013: "Social sciences in a changing global environment" (Hackmann & Moser, 2013a)

Germany, examples are well-funded research and facilities, such as DFG-funded research group on post-growth societies at the University of Jena *(Forschungskolleg "Postwachstumsgesellschaften")* or the "Research group on transformation" at the Norbert Elias Center (NEC), Flensburg University *(Forschungskolleg zu Transformation)*. A more historical orientation is in focus at the Centre for transformation research at the Univeristy of Magdeburg; while the *TransZent* Centre is the first cross-institutional research facility run jointly by the University of Wuppertal and the Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment, and Energy. Other material examples of this trend include the newly launched PhD-funding programs on "The Great Transformation" by the Heinrich-Böll and the Rosa-Luxemburg foundations; or else the Program "*Transformateure*" (i.e. "transformation agents") at the Evangelische Akademie Tutzing, in Bavaria.

As pioneers of social-ecological research in Germany, non-university, non-profit research organizations with a critical tradition heavily influenced this development since the 1980s, taking up social-ecological questions, as well as normative questions of societal transformation, and elaborating innovative trans-disciplinary approaches to deal with them (Ecornet, 2012). Several of these organizations and their representatives count amongst the most vocal and influential voices within the GT debate[171], and have already been mentioned: Most prominent is probably the Wuppertal Institute, one of the best-known climate and environmental research organizations in Europe, which has historically shifted from a discursive focus on *efficiency* –which became particularly prominent through the influence of its founder Ernst U. von Weizsäcker– to an emphasis on *sufficiency*, under the influence from Wolfgang Sachs (who is actually credited with coining the term[172]) and its current president, Uwe Schneidewind, who is also a vocal growth-critic. Other agents in the debate are the *Institut für ökologische Wirtschaftsforschung (iöw)* (Institute for Ecological Economics Research), the Öko-Institut e.V, or the Institut für sozial-ökologische Forschung (ISOE), to name but a few, most of which networked in the *NaWis-Runde* and *Ecornet*[173].

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[171] The Wuppertal Institute, for example, has an own publication series which carries the title *"Impulse zur WachstumsWende"* ("Impulses towards a growth transition")

[172] The concepts of efficiency, sufficiency, and consistency were developed as three possible ways to new conceptions of welfare by the "working group on new welfare models" of the Wuppertal Institute in the 1990s (Biesecker, Wichterich, & von Winterfeld, 2012, p. 24)

[173] *Ecornet* (Ecological Research Network) is the network of non-university, non-for-profit environmental and sustainability research institutes in Germany. The common goal of the Ecornet-

A noteworthy materialization of the discourse on transformative science is the project *Zivilgesellschaftliche Platform Forschungswende*[174] ('civil society platform for a research transition') towards a societal transformation to sustainability, which was set up by the Association of German Scientists (*Vereinigung Deutscher Wissenschaftler*/VDW) as a dialogue-forum for environmental (BUND, NABU, DNR[175]), developmental, and other organizations to discuss together with scientists what orientation public research should adopt for the coming decades. This opening-up of the agenda-setting politics of science to CSOs is expected to foster a re-orientation from a current dominance of market-value creation and technological solutions towards a stronger emphasis on common welfare and planetary limits (Ober, 2013; Vereinigung Deutscher Wissenschaftler/ VDW, 2012). The platform received financial support from the Ministry of the Environment (BMUB) and the German Environmental Office (UBA) (2012-2014).

Last but not least, the critical edge of the GT debate feeds on the rehabilitation of the critique of capitalism to the social sciences in the wake of the Great Recession, seemingly freeing them at last from the spell of Fukuyama's "end of history" thesis (Dörre, Lessenich, & Rosa, 2009; Streeck, 2013; Urhammer & Røpke, 2013). The most visible and unambiguous indicator of this trend is probably the much touted Picketty-debate, based on Harvard University Press' bestselling book ever (Piketty, 2014),

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Institutes is to provide the scientific foundations for societal transformations to sustainability. The eight Ecornet-members –the Ecologic Institut, Institut für Energie- und Umweltforschung Heidelberg (ifeu), Institut für ökologische Wirtschaftsforschung (IÖW), Institut für sozial-ökologische Forschung (ISOE), Institut für Zukunftsstudien und Technologiebewertung (IZT), Öko-Institut e.V., Unabhängiges Institut für Umweltfragen (UfU) und das Wuppertal Institut für Klima, Umwelt, Energie– are devoted mainly to applied transdisciplinary research on ways towards a post-fossil and post-nuclear society. In addition, some of them are acknowledged as some of the most influential think tanks in climate-political matters in all of Europe (see for example: http://wupperinst.org/info/details/wi/a/s/ad/2234). The *NaWis* network *(Verband für Nachhaltige Wissenschaft)*, in turn, has a mixed membership of universities and non-university research facilities – Leuphana University of Lüneburg, the University of Kassel; the Institute for Advanced Sustainability Studies in Potsdam (IASS); and the Wuppertal Institute–, and pursues the goal of promoting transdisciplinary sustainability science in the university-system and beyond.

[174] For an in-depth insight into the topic *Forschungswende* and the initiative, see the special issue Nr. 140/2015 of the *Politische Ökologie* magazine: *Forschungswende. Wissen schaffen für die Große Transformation* ("Research Transition: creating knowledge for the Great Transformation")

[175] NABU stands for „Nature and Biodiversity conservation Union" *(Deutscher Naturschutzbund)*, while DNR is the umbrella organization for German eco-conservationist organizations *(Deutscher Naturschutz Ring)*

which went viral both in academic and political discussion fora, bringing the discussion about the necessary link between inequality and capitalism to the foreground, even if the premises of this debate are mired in fairly orthodox economic assumptions. The growing legion of capitalism-critical intellectuals and media-communicators notably include referents beyond the pool of the 'usual suspects': the Head of Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies, Wolfgang Streeck, for example, views the end of capitalism as a near inevitability (2013, 2014); the (2014 deceased) co-editor of the newspaper *Frankfurter Allegemeine*, Frank Schirrmacher (2010); or else Meinhard Miegel, founder of the conservative think tank Denkwerk Zukunft, yet, as we have seen, a strong advocate of economic downscaling (Miegel, 2010, 2012). Also worth mentioning is the rediscovery of the work of Karl Polanyi (Block, 2014; Fraser, 2011, 2013; Hann & Hart, 2009; Prudham, 2013; Smith, 2013; Somers & Block, 2014; Walker, 2013). Indeed, "Polanyi has gained belated recognition around the world as one of the most important thinkers of the twentieth century. He is regularly invoked by both scholars and activists who challenge unfettered free-market globalization, and his writings are increasingly part of the core canon for sociologists, political scientists, historians, and heterodox economists" (Somers & Block, 2014).

The growing normative implication of academic scholars in the perspective of a social-ecological transformation, as well as the revival of the 1970s critical stances, is exemplarily illustrated by the 2013 publication of the "Convivialist Manifesto. A declaration of interdependence". This initiative of a group of French intellectuals aligning with a tradition of thought dating back to Ivan Illich (1973), brought together around 40 prominent intellectuals, mainly from the social sciences and the humanities – amongst whom Alain Caillé (the convener), Patrik Viveret, Serge Latouche, Eva Illouz, Chantal Mouffe, Edgar Morin, Eve Chiapello, and Yann Moulier-Boutang – to agree on the fundamental guidelines for a new form of social organization that would comply with social and ecological imperatives threatening the very survival of humankind. The manifesto unleashed a public debate in France, and was translated into German in 2014 (Adloff & Leggewie, 2014), where it soon streamed into ongoing debate around a GT.[176]

Last but not least, also coming from the intellectual scene, but this time rather from milieus with social, political, and ecological concerns within the ICT-branch. Drawing on widespread digital developments such as the open-software and the open-source movements, socio-technical entrepreneurs have

[176] For broadened background information and relevant sources and links, see http://www.diekonvivialisten.de/

started experimenting with the collaborative commons taking advantage of – and at the same time further developing – an incipient Internet of Things (IoT) technology and infrastructure. The *Open Source Ecology* movement[177] is a pioneering initiative that is in the process of developing a self-sufficient and self-replicative set of modular, low-cost, user-friendly industrial machines with the capacity of building and sustaining a small, ecologically sustainable society with modern comforts. Authors such as Michel Bauwens and his P2P-Foundation or Jeremy Rifkin (2014) see in these developments the potential for a full-fledged social-ecological 'Great Transformation' to a post-capitalist *glocal* economy unfolding not by means of cultural and political struggle (alone), but through socio-technical co-evolution. While undoubtfully less radical in its conclusions, the aforementioned BMBF-foresight study (Zweck & al., 2015) supports the idea of a more central place for the 'collaborative commons' in modern societies by mid-century.

Excursus: the Degrowth Debate

The critique of economic growth – which can be found under diverse labels such as postgrowth (*Postwachstum*); growth contraction (*Schrumpfung*); growth transition (*Wachstumswende*); or degrowth ('*Entwachstum*') – is older and developed independently from the GT debate, yet eventually it came to be conducted under the header of transformation (Brand, 2016b; Latouche, 2015; Martínez-Alier, Pascual, Vivien, & Zaccai, 2010; Muraca, 2013; Paech, 2012). Indeed, while originally placed at the junction of ecological and cultural critiques to economic growth and development in the 1970s, its contemporary form has evolved to encompass also concerns about democracy, social justice, meaning of life and wellbeing (Asara et al., 2015; D'Alisa, Demaria, & Kallis, 2014; Demaria, Schneider, Sekulova, & Martinez-Alier, 2013).

Over the last 10 years it spread from France over Spain and Italy –its ascendency spurred by development-critical discourses in L. America and Africa – to reach the Anglo-Saxon world, and later also Germany. Leading figures in the intellectual sphere are Serge Latouche (France), Joan Martinez-Alier (Spain), and Tim Jackson (UK). Early inputs to the German discourse on Degrowth where the essay-collections "*Ausgewachsen!*" (Rätz, 2012), *"Postwachstumsgesellschaft"* (Seidl & Zahrnt, 2010) and *"Wirtschaft ohne Wachstum?!"* (Woynowski, 2012), as well as Latouche's (2009) "Farewell to Growth"

[177] Retrieved from http://opensourceecology.org/gvcs/ on 27.08.2017

and Tim Jackson's "Prosperity without growth" (2009a, German translation published 2011). Other widely disseminated texts are *Befreiung vom Überfluss"* (2012) by Niko Paech; Schneidewind & Zahrnt's *"Damit gutes Leben einfacher wird"* (2013, published 2014 in English under the title "The politics of sufficiency: making it easier to live the good life"); and Herald Welzer's "*Thinking by yourself: an instruction for resistance*" (2014), and, in co-authorship with Bernd Sommer, "*Transformation design. Ways into a future-capable society*" (2014), which introduces the concept of a "reductive modernity". The international success of the Degrowth-dictionary "Degrowth: a vocabulary for a new era" (D'Alisa et al., 2014) is indicative of the resonance this discourse is finding in diverse social contexts around the world. The common assessment of all this literature is that the growth-dependency of contemporary economies is at the root of the multiple crisis. The historical struggles of the workers movement led to a strong politization of growth- and distributive questions, overshadowing other problematic issues such as gender justice, environmental pollution, and the consequences of the growth- or export-orientation and their international (imperialistic) preconditions; i.e. that people and nature are exploited in other countries and therethrough contribute to the richness of wealthy countries via international trade (Brand, 2014b; Haberl, Fischer-Kowalski, Krausmann, Martinez-Alier, & Winiwarter, 2011; Hornborg, 1998). Indeed, due to largely unchangeable social and ecological constraints, current Western-middle class lifestyle patterns are naturally non-universalizable and thus *per se* exclusive and parasitic (Brand & Wissen, 2011). Hence a fundamental change towards ways of life based on ideals of sufficiency is required to unlock the pathway to a post-growth society. The question remains how this can be done in a historical context where the "American Way of Life" has virtually been elevated to the category of a basic right, which is pursued by those in the Global South and tightly hold on to by those in the Global North. The degrowth-movement creates the space for social debate to even make imagining alternatives to this world-order possible, in the first place. (Brand, 2014b)

This discussion on welfare and growth is conducted in diverse live-fora, as well as increasingly in networks and in virtual platforms such as *Netzwerk Wachstumswende, the German Degrowth Website, or the network Konzeptwerk Neue Ökonomie*[178]. In addition, the degrowth-perspective is increasingly being adopted by a great variety of social movements and by niches of alternative economic practice, suggesting that degrowth is becoming a catalyzer for a grassroots-based transformation discourse (Konzeptwerk Neue Ökonomie e.V. & DFG-Kolleg Postwachstumsgesellschaften, 2017). Degrowth

[178] https://wachstumswende.de/ ; http://blog.postwachstum.de/; *www.degrowth.de*

established itself as an international movement with the first International Colloquium on Sustainable Degrowth in Lyon (2003), which gathered hundreds of participants from France, Switzerland and Italy (D'Alisa et al. 2014), inaugurating a series of biyearly conferences. The 2014 International Degrowth Conference in Leipzig was considered the most significant grassroots-political event of the year, with over 3000 attendees (Brand, 2014a) and is indicative of the momentum of the Degrowth movement enjoys in Germany and Europe. Another massive grassroots initiative merging a degrowth outlook with climate concerns is *Ende Gelände*[179]. Summoned by anti-nuclear and anti-fossil activist groups with the support of various NGOs and political organizations under the slogan 'system change, not climate change', *Ende Gelände* relies on mass-mobilizations occupying open pit coal mines as a way to symbolically 'take climate negotiations into their own hands' through civil disobedience, with significant impact in the public sphere. Other widespread protest movements include those against large infrastructure projects, movements for food sovereignty and energy democracy, as well as for the "right to the city".(Eversberg & Schmelzer, 2016, p. 6). In societal niches, an outburst of creativity in non-capitalist grassroots' economic practices including eco-communities, cooperatives, ethical banks, urban gardens, time banks and community currencies contribute to secure the basic needs of people relying on new processes of commoning with low material throughput (Asara et al., 2015). The discourse on social-ecological transformation acknowledges this diversity, and offers a rendezvous point to advance conversations and synergies toward whole-societal change (Brand, 2016a).

Even at the level of everyday social practices significant (if not systemic) changes can be observed: an increasing number of young people in Western Europe consciously renounce to eating meat; the vision of 'car-free cities' is spreading – even in major cities like Vienna over fifty percent of households do not own a car any longer–; and the relationship and division of labor between the formal economy and other forms of production, subsistence, and well-being are changing. (Brand, 2016a)

Furthermore, the growth-critique incipiently attracts the interest –or else provokes the reaction– of governments and state agencies, probably (in part at least) out of resignation due to bad prospects for sustaining high growth rates (Misereor & IHS, 2013, p. 13): in 2008 the Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management (short "Life Ministry") launched the initiative "growth in transition" *('Wachstum im Wandel')*, which is conducted jointly with 20 partner organizations – ministries, regional governments, interest groups, private business companies, universities and civil society organizations – with the goal of promoting a multistakeholder-dialogue

[179] Further information under: https://www.ende-gelaende.org

on what type of growth is ecologically and socially sustainable, with the aim of increasing the resilience of the economic system. In this framework, three international conferences were held in Vienna in 2010, 2012, and 2016, and has published a study synthesizing existing growth-critical transformation literature worldwide (Holzinger, 2016).

The Degrowth discussion spans across the political-ideological spectrum (Eversberg & Schmelzer, 2016; Schmelzer, 2015). Growth critique has known both support and attacks from the political right as well as the political left[180]. Left-oriented groups and parties, trade unions, and part of the media more open to question own traditional frameworks. Even if Degrowth can be safely framed as a radical and predominantly anti-capitalistic intellectual and social current, growth-critical positions have expanded in the last years from the margins to the center of many left-oriented groups and even beyond the left, at least in Germany. This should not be regarded as paradoxical, however: after all – even if usually embedded in emancipatory agendas– Degrowth has no emancipatory content per se, as Miegel´s conservative plea for Degrowth illustrates.

Synthesis: The discursive process of the GT

Our review of the pragmatic-material dimension of the diverse discursive arenas in the GT debate can be synthesized by schematizing the discursive process as a whole in diachronic perspective.

The two-decades-long post-Brundtland phase in the field of global social-ecological debates (roughly between the landmark events of Rio 1992 and Rio+20) is characterized by the SD consensus (in line with the "end of history" hypothesis dominating the cultural imaginary in those years), with serious discursive contestation sidelined and confined to the margins; that is, as we described it in Chapter 2, to the space of societal non-existence. The 'cultural mood' in this period is characterized by the institutionalist "logic of appropriateness" and consensus-optimism in governance spheres, and by an either optimistic or else a resigned pragmatism in other social spheres, including activist and academic ones. The central arena of (rather technocratic) SD deliberations during this phase is the policy-sphere. As of 2007-2009, the upsurge of public awareness about global climate change, the beginning of the Great Recession, and increasing resistance in the face of the increasingly apparent paralysis of

[180] Could degrowth have the opposite performativity to that claimed by its advocates, and eventually stabilize the status quo by persuading people that a good life can be achieved with less material encumbrance, even under conditions of structural economic recession?
(Eversberg & Schmelzer, 2016, p. 11)

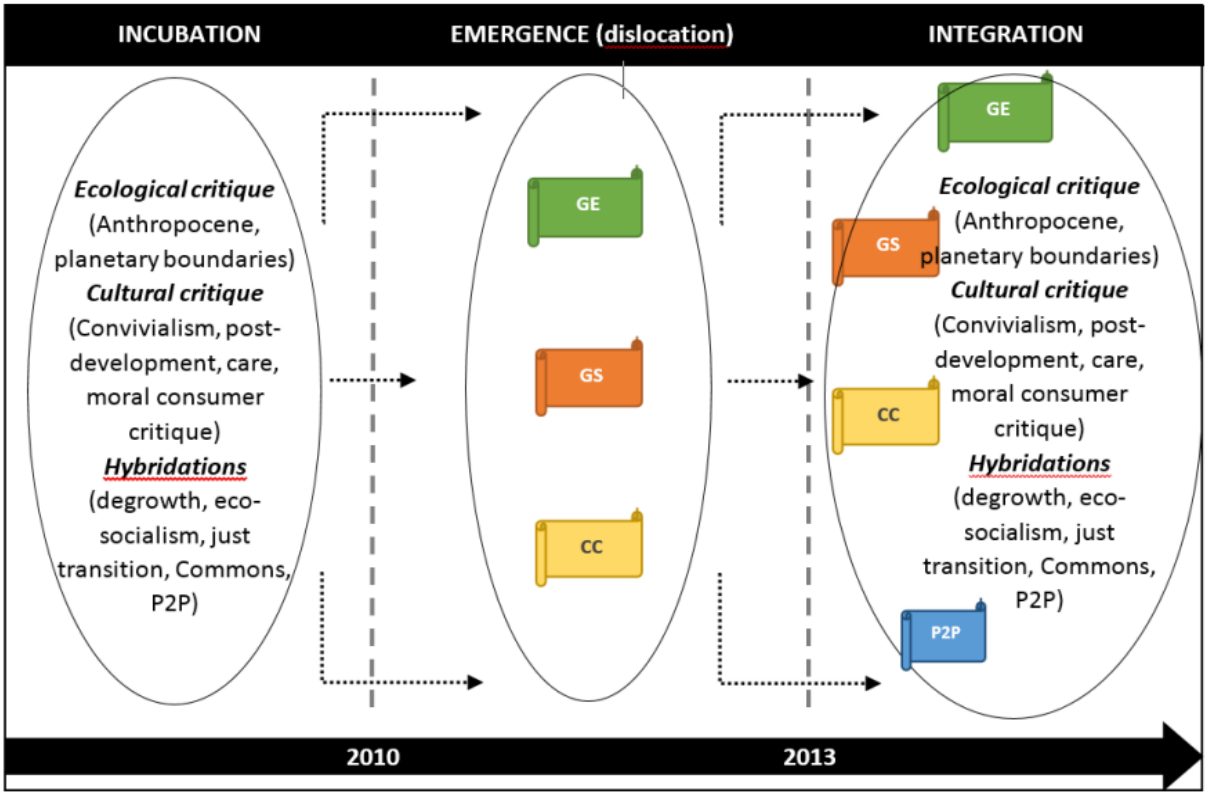
multilateral cooperation, give way to a phase we could denominate of 'incubation', where cultural and political contestation starts reclaiming their space from conformity and from dry technocratic governance arrangements. The central arena shifts from the policy- to the (sub)political sphere, including the international level. An array of ideas and proposals inspired in the spirit of the great cultural contestations of the 1960s and 1970s surface again into the (sub)public sphere(s), as well as concepts from the radical ecological critique: Convivialism, Eco-socialism, Post-development, Sufficiency, and Degrowth – on the one hand – and Anthropocene, planetary boundaries, and Great Acceleration, on the other, count among the revivals in academic and political debates. Historically more novel inputs are the feminist discourse on care and (re)production, as well as the collaborative commons or P2P. Political deliberation at the time revolves around ideas such as Just transition (TUs) and the "Green New Deal".

But the GT debate did not pick up momentum until the WBGU 2011 report came out and the parliamentary Enquete-WWL (2010-2013) provided the proper institutional platform for discussion. We saw that the GT was adopted as a banner by the political opposition in the final report of the Enquete, taking distance from the discursive closure of the ruling coalition and their advisory experts. Hence, in stark contrast to the Brundtland consensus in Rio 1992 (and to the BV debate to be analyzed in Chapter 5), the emergence of the GT debate did not occur by *consensus*, but rather by *dissension* or discursive dislocation. In Chapter 3 we distinguished three main discursive strands contending in the (sub)political arena: The Green Economy (UNEP, OECD, Fücks, etc.), which seeks to repackaging of the Brundtland consensus with marginal influences from progressive social-ecological discourses; the Green Society, which combines the cultural critique and security discourses of the 1970s ('Limits to growth') with the re-emerging vision of the good life as political project. Finally, a conservative growth-critique emphasizes the security dimension and the need for a moral-cultural transformation, and indicates a line of fracture within conservative political elites.

From 2014 onwards, the political momentum progressively evaporates, but not the debate in sub-political, academic, scientific, and activist spheres. We observe a process of dialectical and progressive discursive assemblage, cross-fertilization, or integration, as visible in the profusion of transversal interaction and collaboration platforms (cross-organizational, cross-disciplinary, cross-institutional, including TUs, religion, NGOs, grassroots, science). The attempt at renewed consensus-'performances' (Paris 2015, SDGs) did not have the appeasing effect of Brundtland, but rather fueled the 'cultural mood' of contestation in the GT field of discussion. The full-fledged arrival of a "digital

modernity" and its disruptive foreseeable consequences open up additional room for transformative debates. Figure 12 below summarizes the above.

Figure 12: The GT as a discursive process



4.3. Dramaturgical analysis of the GT debate

Given that our research-goal is understanding the (agential) dynamics behind the emergence of meaning-transformations, the remaining of this chapter is aimed at identifying the diverse pragmatic dimensions of a "successful discursive performance". In the terms of Alexander's (2004) synthetic theory introduced in Chapter 1, this amounts to identifying the diverse *fusions* (cf. Section 1.3.3, Chapter 1) that are required for a discourse to produce cultural-extension effects and psychological identification on the part of the audiences to which the discourse-performance is targeted. The required fusion dialectically integrates 'hard' material factors (organizational, political constraints and opportunities, resources, political and economic power) that would be important for political

opportunity- and resource mobilization theories, as well as 'soft' cultural ones at play in the spatiotemporal situation at hand (e.g. background cultural markers, hermeneutic powers, etc.). Furthermore, contingent elements regarding the agents and their interaction in the particular situation at hand are taken into account, as well.

According to Alexander, a successful 'fusion' of the above dimensions is the precondition for creating and sustaining collective belief, as the inescapable precondition for the success of any collective project. From a normative point of view in democratic societies, however, this fusion-effect of performances should always be *unmasked* (to use a dramaturgical metaphor) through rational deliberation. Yet embracing rationality as a norm does not imply seeing social action as rational in an empirical way. Critical efforts to question a "discourse performance" are usually accompanied by creative efforts to mount a "counter-performance" in turn (J. C. Alexander, 2004, p. 568). The GT debate exemplarily allows to observe both movements of deconstruction and reconstruction (or 'de-fusion' and 're-fusion') implied in transformative learning (cf. Chapter 1). We thus introduce this distinction also in our empirical analysis, under the rubrics of *disruptors* ('undoing unsustainability') and *generators* ('doing sustainability'), respectively. Both movements are to be regarded as *enablers* of transformative learning processes, in the sense of our research question.

These mutually opposing movements will be analyzed considering the diverse aspects of a discourse performance, following Alexander's (2004) analytical categorization: 1) the matching of (foreground) discourse and cultural (background) representations; 2) the matching of the discourse with the contingent spatiotemporal and situational context of instantiation; 3) the enabling and constraining role of social powers of symbolic production, distribution, and interpretation; 4) the credibility/ legitimacy of the discourse performance (i.e. matching of the discourse with the performing actor); and 5) the reception by the discourse addressees (i.e. the matching between discourse and its various audiences). Furthermore, this stage of analysis seeks to gain transversal insights to the various discursive arenas analyzed in the first part of this chapter, so that the categories just outlined will be applied across the agent-centered categories in Section 4.2. The ultimate goal of the chapter is systematizing discursive *enablers* (both 'disruptors' and 'generators') and the relevant *practices* and *roles* of agents in the GT debate derivable therefrom. To be noted, it is not implied that the relevant factors identified as advancing fusion in each dimension have or are been *intendedly* deployed to that avail by self-aware transformative agents in the GT debate, although it is suggested that they potentially *could*

be strategically harnessed for the purpose of deliberately advancing the emergence of transformative learning processes.

The method applied for this dramaturgical analysis was a triangulation of the reconstruction of the GT-pragmatics in the first part of this chapter, the findings of Chapter 3 on the ideational dimensions of the GT discourse, and secondary literature, all structured through Alexander's heuristic framework.

Match between (foreground) discourse and background cultural representations:

Recalling the notions introduced in Chapter 1, this criterion tests the fit of a cognitive or discursive project against the established cultural model, including tacit assumptions about the world (ontological, epistemological, anthropological, etc.), socially legitimized moral values, etc. With this first test, we seek to assess the *cognitive plausibility* of the discursive project at hand (Eder, 2006). To that purpose, this section builds on the insights gained in Chapter 3, yet gearing them toward the articulation of discourses as "cognitive projects" and their broader cultural context.

The indicator that a discursive project was successfully 'fused' with the prevalent cultural representations is that the discourse seems truthful and produces cultural extension effects – required is also, as we will see below, that the discursive 'script' gets through to the audience, which would make it seem real and produce psychological identification (J. C. Alexander, 2004, p. 555). A precondition for this, of course, is that the audience is familiarized with the codes (categories, frames) deployed. In a complex social order, such familiarity is always a matter of degree, and the script (i.e. a particular instantiation of a given discourse) is always an "action-oriented subset of background understandings" (p. 550).

This presents a particularly heavy challenge in the case of a whole-societal transformation discourse, as it risks crippling the recognizability of the codes used in the discourse. While in its wholeness and specificity, the GT is arguably too complex and too abstract a discourse for the larger public sphere to pick it up (see section on 'Obstacles' below), we have seen in the first half of this chapter that some key elements of a whole-societal transformational perspective are *de facto* shaking deeply entrenched cultural pillars in the Western(-like) world, be it through lived experience, through contradictions becoming increasingly apparent at a more abstract level, or by the weight of evidence in terms of the

most revered form of knowing in the modern world: science. Moreover, non-modern yet culturally deeply ingrained imaginaries, such as romantic or religious ones, also add to the progressively upbuilding picture of a doomed conventional modern worldview by awakening nostalgias and questioning of industrialist postulates. (W. Sachs, 2014)

Yet characteristic of the GT debate is also that agents do not attempt a wholesale critique of modernity, but rather draw on the 'surplus meaning' of positively connoted modern signifiers to expand significations towards new ways of understanding modern life beyond *business-as-usual* imaginaries and practices. In Hartmut Rosa's terms, the GT combines critique (e.g. the 'missile word' *degrowth*) with promise ('the good life'). In their performative function, the 'pull' force of the concrete utopia is synergic with the 'push' of the 'realistic dystopia' of anthropogenic global environmental change.

Let us first address disrupting factors of the unsustainable status quo: At a general level, the "promise of modernity" has been diagnosed as loosing attractivity (H. Rosa, 2003, 2010), insofar an increasing number of people, also in the affluent countries, experiences it ever less as an emancipatory vehicle to freedom and a brighter future, and increasingly as a straight-jacket. There is a widespread feeling of alienation, whereby individuals are compelled to run ever faster as on a slippery slope, i.e. not to progress, but just to maintain their position in society. In particular, the simultaneity of the deadlock in multilateral climate cooperation and the public outrage over 'too big to fail'-business companies and their massive taxpayer-financed out-bailing implied an upfront attack on deeply held beliefs and values (market-efficiency, responsibility, meritocracy, equality, justice, etc.). In addition, the plausible prospect of major socio-technical disruptions, be it a (potentially) emancipatory one (e.g. Rifkin's 'Third Industrial Revolution') or a gloomy one (Industry 4.0 and massive structural unemployment) lays fertile ground for discourses of systemic breakdown or *multiple-interlinked crisis* to flourish.

Additional support for these views comes from new theoretical-conceptual developments in the scientific sphere: Anthropocene, Earth-system or 'planetary boundaries' and the implied discursive centrality of global systemic interdependence, tipping points, discontinuous and abrupt change, the evidence of rebound-effects, among others, as well as the hitherto failed promise of techno-fixes and persistent paradoxes (e.g. Jevon's paradox, Easterlin-paradox) has damaged the modern "Promethean" imaginary of control (Dryzek, 1997); and precautionary discourses are on the rise (Dryzek, Goodin, Tucker, & Reber, 2008). Moreover, the above scientifically backed concepts challenge the classical modern dualist ontology splitting society and nature apart: social and ecological issues are now reframed as two sides of the same coin (Manuel- Navarrete & Buzinde, 2010).

The merger of existential environmental threats with the frustration of half a century of the unfulfilled promise of 'global development' has given rise to critical ways of looking at global relations, and economic globalization is being questioned as a "false necessity" (Unger, 2004). Unlike earlier geopolitical and geo-economic theories (decolonial, dependency theory, World-Systems analysis), however, the concept of *imperial ways of life* (Brand & Wissen, 2011, 2017) scrutinizes structural relations of domination of a cultural, rather than merely of a material nature, complementing and extending the critiques of the global Environmental and Climate Justice movements (Bond & Dorsey, 2010; Martinez-Alier, Temper, Del Bene, & Scheidel, 2016). Not only socio- and eco-, but also north and south are incipiently being perceived as two sides of the same coin in this global multidimensionally interdependent world of the 21st century.

But the most serious blow to the unsustainable status quo is arguably delivered by the Degrowth critique, because growth-logic is so deeply embedded in the contemporary mindset (Welzer, 2011). From Chapter 3 we know that GDP growth, sufficiency, re-localization are the watershed-issues in the GT debate. Yet the evidence of historically unprecedented inequality rates at the global level (Oxfam, 2016) as inherent to the dynamics of capitalism (Piketty, 2014), contrasted against the relatively successful experience of more equal societies (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010), and the difficulty or impossibility of decoupling economic expansion from its ecological impacts (Santarius, 2014, 2015; Sorrell, 2007), coupled with the anyway glim prospects for sustaining future growth rates at high levels, opens a fracture in the hitherto undisputed growth-narrative (Santarius, 2012).

The growth-critical perspective seeks the upfront deconstruction of the 'triumphant narrative' of capitalism, industrialism, and modernity, and Degrowth is meant as a "missile word" (Demaria et al., 2013; Kallis, 2017) to debunk these narratives. While politically less promising, and even if the term 'degrowth' should disappear in the future, the *problematique* it unveils will not, and contributes decidedly to undermining the prevailing symbolic order. Positive 'generative' fusions might be more successfully attempted by some of the concepts below.

Having reviewed factors disrupting the status quo, let us turn to the discursive 'generators' fusing around a promising, credible vision of sustainable future.

The ideational articulations and docking-opportunities described at depth in Chapter 3 exemplarily show how to connect the GT script with the background cultural representations of modern societies by selectively drawing on culturally established ecological and socially progressive values.

In normative terms, the GT debate purports the script of a 'good life' as opposed to a 'better life' (or *la dolce vita* for a few, as Alberto Acosta puts it). A fusion is thus sought around a new vision of prosperity. Both discussion and sustainability-practice have started to move beyond technological and market-driven solutions (von Jorck, 2014, p. 28). The surplus-meaning of established values (freedom, democracy, equality, individuality, science) are turned into seeds of critique and subversion, as apparent in aforementioned concepts such as "right to sufficiency", "positive freedom", or "transformative science" (cf. Chapter 3).

Furthermore, transformative agents can harvest the symbolic yields of the liberal discourse which resonate with the self-image of Germany as a modern (leading) European nation. The European tradition of social-market capitalism offers grounding for *Green New Deal*-type of narratives and the like, focus on green jobs, etc. In addition, Germany prides itself, both culturally and politically, in being arguably the world's 'green standard-bearers' and a leading force in multilateral environmental governance. The further deterioration not only in the *state* of the Earth, but also of the *rate* of ecological degradation (Steffen et al., 2015) cannot be good for this sense of national pride: the urgency of doing something about it could be a driver for action (e.g. increasing popular pressure for the success of the *Energiewende*).

Moreover, Germany is famous for its 'futuring culture', as indicated, for example, by it high saving rates, politically incisive precautionary frames (e.g. decades long movement of nuclear opposition), or by the consciousness about the future-shaping power of current generations (as evidenced, for example, in the publication of *Zukunftfähiges Deutschland*, or by the government-funded futuring-forum *Futurim*[181], located in the heart of the government district in Berlin). The central place of *control* as a German value is re-framed as *self-control*, instead of outward control. The strong institutionalist political culture grants institutional-conservative approaches – such as the liberal reformist growth critique or the 'new social contract'-approach of the WBGU analyzed in Chapter 3 – greater leverage than TDs would otherwise have. The post-materialistic value-change, especially in younger generations, allows for the mainstreaming of discourses on time-prosperity, care, spirituality, and relativizing the importance of ownership as opposed to utilization, etc. Finally, the strongly upheld values of individual recognition (meritocracy) can be displaced from the capitalist market competition heading full-steam towards the dystopian vision of the 'end of word' towards a thriving collaborative P2P society.

[181] See: https://www.futurium.de/

Table 6: GT Articulation Discourse-culture

Disruptors ('unbuilding unsustainability')	**Generators ('building sustainability')**
• *Promise of modernity → Multiple-interlinked crisis ('doomsday model')* • *Control-imaginary →Anthropocene/pl. boundaries* • *Global development → Imperial modes of living* • *Progress, prosperity → Easterlin paradox; prospect of major socio-technical disruption (TiR, Industry 4.0, massive structural unemployment)* • *Techno-fix, decoupling →Jevon's paradox* • *rational-choice agent →agent as carrier of practices*	• *'better life' →Good life* • *'Futuring'-culture (precautionary values / e.g. nuclear opposition): Outward control →self-control* • *National self-understanding as world's 'green standard-bearers' and leaders in multilateral climate politics* • *Surplus meaning of modern liberal values (right to sufficiency, positive freedom, transformative science)* • *Market competition/ industry 4.0 → collaborative P2P society*

Match between discourse and contingent situation / spatiotemporal context

This second stage of dramaturgical analysis focuses on what in Foucaultian terms we would call the concrete utterance or *énonciation* of the discursive-typical statements *(énoncés)* dealt with in the first stage; i.e. identifying specific context-traits and matching them with specific enabling settings and material devices of discursive production or *dispositifs*. Indeed: "The underlying strains or conflicts of interest in a social situation simply do not 'express' themselves. Social problems must not only be symbolically plotted or framed, but also must be performed on the scene" (J. C. Alexander, 2004, p. 555). In dramaturgical terms, this would be equivalent to the *mise-en-scène* or staging process**.** According to Hajer, the *mise-en-scène* "refers to the deliberate organization of an interaction, drawing on existing symbols and the invention of new ones, as well as on the distinction between active players and (presumably passive) audiences" (2005, p. 631). Hence, departing from the theoretical assumption of a relative autonomy of symbolic action from its 'social base', this stage of analysis looks at the articulation of ideational and material, contingent and structural factors (e.g. political climate, collective memory of significant events in the recent past, symbolic impact of contingent events, etc.) to understand the contingent symbolic plausibility of the GT debate in its specific spatiotemporal coordinates. To this purpose, we draw on the various arenas empirically identified in the first part of

the chapter as stages of the GT performance: science and politics of science, political and policy spheres, CSOs (environmental, developmental, church, common-good oriented think-tanks), SMOs, grassroots and niches of alternative practice, and special interest groups (trade unions, business, think tanks with a particularistic agenda).

Various disruptive factors loosening the SD-consensus can be identified. The international spotlight on climate change as of 2006-2007 – propelled through the almost simultaneous appearance of Al Gore's 'An Inconvenient Truth', the IPCC's Nobel prize, and the Stern Report (Maslin, 2014) – merging with the public focus on the later called Great Recession (2007 onwards) created conditions for a destabilization of the prevailing symbolic order: a horizon of jobless, low-growth, and the ensuing breakdown of the post-war class-compromise made the critique of capitalism – tabooed in the West since the Cold War – become again socially acceptable (Dörre et al., 2015; Sparsam et al., 2014; Streeck, 2013). An important catalyzer prefiguring the GT debate was the *Green New Deal* narrative in the early stages of the crisis. The GT debate, as a more complex and decentralized discursive arena, catalyzed, as we saw, around two kick-off events: the 2010-2013 Enquete-WWL (with its countless spin-off forums) was driven, on the one hand, by the backwind of a political momentum for a 'red-red-green' parliamentary alliance under the GT-banner against a right-of-center ruling coalition, and, on the other, by contagion of a widespread international debate on welfare indicators. The second catalyzer, the 2011 WBGU-report, seeks to raise the bar of international SD debates calling for a 'new social contract' for a GT in the context of Rio+20 (noteworthily, the English translation replaces the term 'Great Transformation' with 'sustainability). From its very exposed site of enunciation at the interface between the scientific and the policy spheres, the WBGU took some risk in questioning the mainstream SD discourse – particularly in its demands for a steered far-reaching cultural transformation – supported by the social legitimacy of science. This risk-taking was likely prompted also by the legitimacy-crisis of science itself[182], which provides the push towards greater scholarly engagement with normative and practical issues (in particular, regarding *geostorical* challenges). In Germany, the existence of an established infrastructure of (relatively more flexible, dynamic, and practice-oriented) non-academic, critical research institutions – as well as own units of research and

[182] Also crisis of science, in terms of its legitimacy to uphold a claim to superior, authoritative knowledge (Beck, 1992; Funtowicz & Ravetz, 1993; Gallopin et al., 2001); and its relevance and capacity to solve humanity's most fundamental and pressing problems (Hackmann & Moser, 2013a; Mauser et al., 2013; Moser, Hackmann, & Caillods, 2013) → transformation as a vindication of the role of science.

philosophical reflection (*Grundsatzfragen*[183]) in NGOs, trade unions, state agencies, etc. – facilitated swift convergence of a significant part of the scholarly sphere around the GT as a discursive focus and research-priority. Key in this development *ad intra* the scientific sphere was also the existence of a priority focus at national state level (BMBF) on Social-Ecological Research (SÖF). The fortuitous coincidence of this unfolding debate under the rubric of 'transformation' with the official launching of the German Energy Transition (*Energiewende*) after the nuclear accident in Fukushima (2011), reinforced the utopian momentum. The GT debate was further exogenously spurred over time by to other two high-profile multilateral processes: the 2015 climate summit in Paris (which prompted the publication of Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'*) and the SDGs-process of the United Nations that same year. Around these landmark events at national and international level, a variety of other (sub)political actors appeared on the stage. Highly organized and globally networked NGOs teamed up with growing anti-systemic movements (*Attac*, Environmental and Climate Justice, Via Campesina, etc.) and the transformative proposals of governments in small countries in the global south who had captured the popular imagination, such as the indigenous-inspired *Buen vivir* in Ecuador and in Bolivia (where it is rather called *Vivir Bien*)(cf. Chapter 5), but also unusual suspects like the trade unions, who had joined the international debate in the Copenhagen climate summit of 2009 with their "just transition" discourse, made the lock-in of (multilateral) politics increasingly apparent ('G-zero'), thus prompting a shift in the GT-stage from mainstream politics to sub-political arenas in civil society and transversal platforms across state, religion, grassroot movements, NGOs, and science, in various partial combinations (cf. Section 4.2). Remarkably, ideas of system-change and degrowth are also prompting acts of protest (periodic *Wir haben es Satt* mass demonstrations against the agribusiness model) and civil disobedience (*Ende Gelände*).

The convergent status-quo-disrupting factors above are reinforced by an array of generative stimuli for the emergence of the new: The narrative or symbolic plausibility of 'radical futures' brought about by the convergence of an "emancipatory catastrophism" (Beck, 2015b), destabilizing entrenched unsustainable symbolic orders – prompting, among others, the green-red fusion in activism and incipiently also in politics (cf. Section 4.2) –, and attractive future prospects such as the rise of alternative forms of production and consumption (collaborative commons, a prosumer P2P-society), together with a relative amicable context of practice with innovations which have overflown the

[183] Transl. 'fundamental issues' or 'questions of principle'.

boundaries of ecovillages and expanded into society at large (urban gardening, food cooperatives, repair-cafés, etc.). The profusion of discursive corridors in the form of cross-disciplinary, cross-sectoral platforms served not only the purpose of spreading systemic critique, of course, but also that of spreading utopian counter-visions and activating collaboration.

Even when characterized by low reflexivity and path-dependent, business-as-usual discursive reproduction, larger government-led, participative futuring drafting-processes (*Zukunftsdialog* on the good life, *Zukunftscharta*) installed broad referential topics in the public sphere (Reisch & Bietz, 2014, p. 16). More focused futuring forums, in turn, particularly those conceived as platforms for reflection and dialogue on controversial/tabooed topics, such as growth or consumption downscaling, or a 'democratization of science', proved true discourse-production arenas in the GT debate: The Growth in Transition initiative (*WiW*) by the Austrian Life Ministry, the state-funded DGF-Research Consortium on Post-growth Societies at Jena University, the social information center and deliberation forum *Futurim*, multi-stage deliberative processes such as *Wohlstand wie anders*, SPDs *Fortschrittsforum*, the civil society platform for the research transition *Forschungswende*, etc.

Furthermore, the GT debate has diffracted into a multitude of sub-discourses around more concrete topics (as summarized by the axial themes of the GT debate identified in Chapter 3); each of them developing a 'life of their own'. Also, the controversial character of discussions (particularly around the *Degrowth* strand) would help both de-fuse the SD-consensus and, at the same time, fuel the permanence and intensity of the GT debate. Other strands of debate, in turn, allow for concrete action proposals goes beyond deliberative interaction. Material *dispositifs*, which can be regarded at once as an outcome of and as an input to the GT discourse, include, for example:

- Influential publications (and their respective trailers), including the abovementioned *Laudato Si'*, the 2011 WBGU-report, Tim Jackson's *Prosperity without Growth* (translated into German in the midst of the Enquete-WWL debates, and becoming the all-time bestseller of the publishing house Oekom), Miegel's *Exit* (republished by the *bpb:* German Agency for Political Education, together with Jackson's book), among others, further developed the contents of the GT debate and maintained public interest. Moreover, the emergence of an organic inter-textual network around these iconic publications (including follow-up publications, but also countless academic and public discussion fora, conferences, talk-series, etc.) was instrumental to the reproduction of the GT debate
- in the policy-sphere: proposals for "non-reformist reforms", for example *Energiewende*, UBI, or the emergence of a new policy sphere around the structural dimensions of *time,* including

regulations on the durability of manufactured products or on working time, the mainstreaming of care, etc. Other dispositifs include political programs (WiW, Plan B of *Die Linke*), projects at ministerial (especially education and research BMBF and development cooperation BMZ) or specialized agency levels (Federal Environmental Office UBA)

- in civil society: collaborative platforms such as *Transition Network, Wachstumswende* or *degrowth.de,* and various direct-action initiatives around themes such as fossil-fuel divestment, food sovereignty, prosumer initiatives (e.g. do-it-yourself facilities), urban gardening, decentralized monetary systems (e.g. experiments with blockchain technologies) and local currencies.
- in the field of science: the emergence of transformative science as a new scholarly orientation, the civil society platform for a Research Transition (*Forschungswende*), or the Convivialist Manifesto.

Table 7 : GT Articulation discourse-contingent situation

Disruptors ('unbuilding unsustainability')	**Generators ('building sustainability')**
• Simultaneous spotlight on climate change as of 2006-2007 and on the financial crisis after 2007 • technical and cultural attacks on mainstream discourse supported in the socially legitimized language of science • knowledge about Earth-systemic megatrends • critique of capitalism becomes again socially acceptable • Breakdown of the postwar class-compromise • Political crisis of legitimacy (G-zero, rise of extreme right, post-democracy) • Legitimacy crisis of science pushing towards greater normative and practical engagement of scholars (particularly with 'geostorical-challenges)	• Sub-political institutional sphere: profusion of cross-disciplinary, cross-sectoral collaboration platforms as discursive corridors • convergence of diverse social and ecological emancipatory struggles (red-green fusion) • Narrative plausibility of 'radical futures' • Larger government-led, participative futuring drafting-processes installing topics on the agenda. • Relatively amicable context of practice (rise of alternative forms of production and consumption) • Catalyzers & Levers: new programmatic orientations ('transformative science'), 'non-reformist reform' proposals (UBI, time policy, Energiewende), deliberative platforms (Enquete, Forschungswende), iconic publications (WBGU, Laudato Si, Prosperity without Growth)

Enabling and constraining role of social powers

According to Alexander and his co-authors "Power establishes an external boundary for cultural pragmatics that parallels the internal boundary established by a performance's background representation" (J. C. Alexander et al., 2006, p. 36). Social power affects the performance of a discourse by mediating the access to the means of *symbolic production* and of *symbolic distribution* (the latter becoming more important the greater the technological mediation of the performance), and of course, through the power of interpretative mediation, i.e. of critique and censorship (hermeneutic power). Taken together, these interlocked power structures illuminate the material-structural preconditions making the GT debate possible – including the material (self-)reproduction of transformative agents –, and allow reflections on the possibility of deliberately developing (or not) material structures that embody the same key principles.

a. Symbolic Production

One outstanding feature of the GT debate, as we have mentioned, is its polyarchic character. There is no monopoly or oligopoly of meaning-production; rather shared meanings are varyingly shaped with inputs from diverse epicenters in dialectical mutual interrelation. Even if agents clearly present power differentials in terms of their visibility, public legitimacy, economic resources at their disposal, etc., this distributed nature of the debate yields a relatively balanced distribution in the power for symbolic production. Furthermore, despite the disparities mentioned, all participants have certain amount of resources available for their own production of content through research: indeed, most NGOs, technical state agencies, trade unions, etc. have their own organizational departments for dealing with 'fundamental questions' (*Grundsatzfragen*), and for their publication (grey literature) (see point on self-reproduction below).

But diversity is also important *ad intra* each of the nodes of the GT-network, as it lowers internal conformity-pressures. This is a clear lesson taught, for example, by the political foundations, whose discursive patterns may differ significantly from the mainstream discourse within the organization, and also from the 'official' discourse of their associated political party. Hence the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation strongly fosters the idea of a "transformative left" over the mainstream classical "distributive left" (Brand, 2014b), and at the Heinrich-Böll Foundation, the two factions of so-called *Realos* and *Fundis* have managed to co-exist in creative tension, and share executive power through a

double-head directorship. Hence organizational and institutional design comes to the fore again here as a way of balancing discourse.

Another aspect empowering the symbolic production of transformative discursive contents is the existence of cooperation infrastructures and networks linking diverse sub-systems, as discussed in the previous section. This plays a double enabling function: first, this transversality allows for political debate about fundamental issues at a supra-systemic or whole-societal level, and provides the possibility of a practical counterpart to deliberation (e.g. a politics of time yielding a transformative time policy). Secondly, the existence of crossover-platforms (e.g. the transdisciplinary of social-ecological research) implies that agents are structurally freed, to an extent, at least, from internal conformity pressures with their own spheres (in our example: with academic disciplines) or self-referential drives.

The two above aspects are key for interrupting the prevalent symbolic order. On the side of the *generators* producing discursive novelty, the empirical material yielded two further aspects. First, institutional design is instrumental also here to the capacity of production of transformative symbolic content in the GT debate. We observe, for example, instances of institutionalized mainstreaming of diversity in democratic will-formation (e.g. parliamentary *Enquetes*[184], sub-political forums such as political foundations, *Kirchentag*, etc.), protected spaces for bold imagination and experimentation (e.g. learning labs such as the Smart CSOs or the network *Wachstumswende*), or an institutionalized long-term and high-complexity orientation (WBGU, *Enquetes*, specialized and semi-public forums).

Secondly, and the importance of the abovementioned distributed character of meaning-production notwithstanding, the priority-setting by agents with key enabling capacities remains, of course, of great importance: The high-priority given to social-ecological themes in selected state-funded and/or state-organized programs, particularly in research (e.g. SÖF, Jena DFG research consortium) but also in

[184] *Enquete*-commissions constitute a singular instrument of discourse-production. Forcefully convened at the request of only 25% of congressional seats, minorities are given agenda-setting power in parliamentary debates. Political pressure for decisions is removed: they constitute a space for the discussion of complex long-term issues, and issue a final report with recommendations to governments. They can also be continued in a following legislative period (shielding from the logic of short electoral cycles). Fifty percent of the commission is composed by Members of Parliament, the rest by external stakeholders and experts, which diverts from the party competition-logic. These institutional features make structural room for discursive diversity and root-searching (Brand, Pühl, & Thimmel, 2013, p. 37)

facilitating public deliberation (e.g. Austrian Growth in Transition program, *Futurium* center in Berlin), play a major role in fueling the GT debate.

Table 8: Articulation Discourse-power of symbolic production

Disruptors ('Unbuilding unsustainability')	**Generators ('Building sustainability')**
• Separation between power of symbolic production and distribution • High-capillarity distribution infrastructure (state, churches, development sector, etc.) • Large non-for profit economic actors • Enabling and empowering distributed symbolic production • Shielding high-capillarity infrastructures of distribution from direct political, market, and cultural pressures (e.g. state channels) • Balancing, positive discrimination practices	• Communicating vessels with politics, the economy, and the socio-cultural sphere. (agents as 'peninsulas', not 'islands' • Strategic synchronization in symbolic distribution (creation of framework of cross-referencing) • Institutional platforms for aggregation and systematization of local experiments and diffusion of institutional standards. • Activating practices: provide leadership, build trust, translate sub-cultural codes

b. Symbolic Distribution

Substantially contributing not only to creating a 'freed space' for symbolic contestation to emerge, but also for these alternative discursive projects to circulate in the GT debate is the separation between material and symbolic power. Indeed, by implication, the polyarchic nature of the debate means that symbolic production is not exclusively concentrated in the conglomerates of material power, and that contents are distributed in the very process of their creation. This is made possible by a basic high-capillarity distribution infrastructure formed by institutions with sophisticated and extensive structures: religious institutions, the development sector, the academic (and, to an extent, also non-for-profit extra-academic research) sector, the political foundations, and, of course, state-channels and state-subsidized diffusion of relevant civic-educational materials (e.g. through the Federal Agency for Political Education, BPB), as well as through progressive academic mainstreaming, and the spread though social media and other horizontal communication platforms. The existence of large non-for profit economic agents, such as the churches, which are the second-largest employers in Germany after the state, makes such far-reaching infrastructure possible. To be sure, on the flip-side, the autonomy of these actors from public scrutiny can be regarded as problematic in its own terms. Yet

their autonomy is relative: they are still subject to the rule of law, exposed to the dictates of public opinion, and – in the long run – dependent on funding from a democratically controlled state. However, the relative resilience they enjoy with respect to the political game, the capitalist profit-motive, and the prevalent cultural model as embodied in average public preferences places these actors in a unique position for embodying and spreading transformation discourses challenging the prevalent cultural model by offering 'counter-current' points of orientation away from acceleration, globalization, commodification, quantitative growth (Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014, p. 29).

In addition to the above infrastructural conditions, concrete agential practices of positive discrimination can play a significant role, setting either on impact or on critical-mass: media outlets oriented towards social, cultural, and political analysis with a non-massive yet stable readership (*Blätter*, *Oekom Verlag*, TAZ, etc.), bestselling authors such as Herald Welzer or Robert Skidelsky, or else self-driven discursive agents spreading discourse through their own (often also state-subsidized[185]) publishing means, discussion forums, digital network-channels, etc.

The infrastructures referred to above not only constitute structural destabilizers of the symbolic order, moreover they can be harnessed to support "a transition from narrow self-interest to social behaviors, or from relentless novelty to a considered conservation of things that matter" (Jackson, 2009a, p. 98). The state, for example, but also the churches and other large CSOs can help "spread a culture based on different measures of time and space and different lifestyle priorities, involving fewer things and fewer commodities", they can deliberately "counterweight instrumental rationality and foster activities and behaviors away from all-pervasive cost-benefit calculation" (Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014, p. 66) and "demonstrate that such a culture is equally valid and has an equal right to be supported by the common institutional framework" (p. 51).

If some form of *shielding* from political, economic, and cultural pressures was essential to the production of TDs, what is critical to their symbolic distribution-capacity is the existence of structural *communicating vessels* with the spheres of culture, politics, and/or the economy. In the GT debate,

[185] Worthwhile examples I came across are the producer of digital transformation-related materials with a critical outlook, *Fairbindung* (https://www.fairbindung.org/), and *ecapio* (http://ecapio.org/), a small initiative which records and makes conferences related to the topics global, social, and environmental justice available online. Both are partly state-funded.

transformative agents are metaphorically viewed as "peninsulas" and not as "islands[186]" (WBGU, 2014, p. 74). Individual agents are embedded in physical or digital interconnected web of network structures (Future Earth, NaWis, Ecornet, Transition Towns, *Wachstumswende*, etc.) (cf. Section 4.2). Furthermore, the construction of an intertextual referential framework across networks is not the only relevant factor seemingly helping the GT debate emerge and spread: the near *simultaneity* of its build-up likely played a decisive role in helping it reach a critical mass. As we saw, the base of the discursive field was constituted by and large within the sessions-period of the Enquete-WWL (2010-2013) and its aftermath, creating the 'discursive corridors' that unfolded during the following years connecting the 'peninsular' GT debate with the 'continent' of the larger public sphere.

In addition, this meso-level infrastructure combining some degree of 'shielding' with some degree of 'leverage' provides other key services linked to the distribution of TDs as symbolic projects: It allows for systematization, continuity, and consistency through the mutual engagement of discourses in the field, and creates a meso-level of implementation articulating abstract macro-perspectives such as the Anthropocene or the idea of 'sufficiency' with particular local transformation-experiments such as Transition Towns. This would serve the twofold objective of aggregation and systematization of particular experiences and the diffusion of institutionalized standards. (Ronzheimer, 2013)

Summarizing the above in terms of practices that agents could typically rely on to reproduce conditions of possibility for an efficacious distribution of transformative symbolic content: First, enabling and empowering distributed symbolic power, independently of material power. Possible means to this end are countless, but facilitating the connection of small discourse-producers to larger, high-capillarity infrastructures of distribution (e.g. state channels) and shielding the latter from direct political, market, and cultural pressures – be it through institutional design, funding schemes, etc. – is a powerful pattern, as the GT debate attests. The creation of communicating vessels between small-scale transformative developments and larger, more resilient networking-platforms amounts to the creation of structural preconditions. Yet agency will also be required to facilitate dialogue, build trust, provide leadership, translate sub-cultural codes, empower weaker nodes (for example, by bridging

[186] According to Robert Brulle (2000), it was the 'insular' character of the hippie movement prevented them to foster large-scale social change in the 1960s and 1970s: they did not develop communicative vessels with the 'continent'. That was arguably also part of the reason why events and actors which were successful in terms of public resonance, proved ephemeral in their collective learning-impacts: editorial successes such as Meadows et al.'s 'Limits to Growth' (1972) or E.F. Schumacher's "Small is beautiful" (1973) spring to mind as examples.

information asymmetries), etc., and seek to *synchronize* discursive inputs to create a critical mass sustaining discursive counter-projects over time.

Table 9: Articulation Discourse – power of symbolic distribution

Disruptors ('Unbuilding unsustainability')	Generators ('Building sustainability')
• Separation between power of symbolic production and distribution • High-capillarity distribution infrastructure (state, churches, development sector, etc.) • Large non-for profit economic actors • Enabling and empowering distributed symbolic production • Shielding high-capillarity infrastructures of distribution from direct political, market, and cultural pressures (e.g. state channels) • Balancing, positive discrimination practices	• Communicating vessels with politics, the economy, and the socio-cultural sphere. (agents as 'peninsulas', not 'islands' • Strategic synchronization in symbolic distribution (creation of framework of cross-referencing) • Institutional platforms for aggregation and systematization of local experiments and diffusion of institutional standards. • Activating practices: provide leadership, build trust, translate sub-cultural codes

c. Hermeneutic power (interpretation, censorship)

In today's complex and largely unintelligible world, people increasingly delegate the function and the power to interpret (i.e. make sense) to scholarly experts, media-persons, to media-outlets (e.g. a prestigious newspaper or publishing house), or even – as the strong social resonance of the Encyclical *Laudato Si'* attests, for example – also to religious authorities; that is, to organizations which are conventionally accorded hermeneutic or interpretative authority, or to individuals by virtue of their professional expertise or over-average cultural capital (Stengel, 2011). We hereafter refer to these agents as *meaning-making elites*. (Assadourian & The Worldwatch Institute, 2010; Stengel, 2011)

In the case of the GT debate, we can see media outlets such as the abovementioned *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik*, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, or TAZ, for example, playing this role. Publishing houses such as *Oekom* are committed to diffusing GT contents through periodic publications or books, as are popular authors such as the aforementioned Herald Welzer or Robert Skidelsky. Through progressive academic mainstreaming, academic journals not only in Ecological Economics or Political

Ecology, but increasingly also in mainstream social science journals such as *Theory, Culture, and Society* are becoming referents for GT-discussions in their respective circles of influence.

Yet even if the power of interpretation does not necessarily lie with producers or distributers of the symbolic content, the fact that the GT debate largely unfolds through dispositifs such as grey literature and (semi)public deliberative forums implies that production and interpretation of symbolic content are largely coupled and, due to the polyarchic character of the debate, highly distributed. A macro-level, structural, and general precondition for this covarying production and interpretation is the existence of a culture of deliberation, which Germany praises itself for (*Debattenkultur*). While such macro-structural conditions are more difficult to reproduce at will, it is clearly not something that cannot be deliberately fostered as a long-term enterprise through adequate infrastructure (e.g. formal education) and promotion, as illustrated by the idea of promoting a *'transformative literacy'* (Schneidewind). The normalization and routinization of common understanding about the multiple crisis, its causes, and intervention options, as well as the opportunities and constraints for the latter, de-naturalize the currently prevailing symbolic order and render it amenable to questioning, imagining alternatives, and invite collective learning.

The aforesaid notwithstanding, the presence of 'censorship' is ubiquitous in the GT debate: indeed, the intellectualist bias of the topic, its counter-cultural character, and the difficulty of immediate material derivations make the constraints of a structural, distributed, Foucauldian notion of censorship-power visible: it is the censorship of taboo, the censorship of political rituals which mandate that "the 'right' proposal be stroke if it should come from the 'wrong' party" (Schellnhuber, in *Discussion between Hans-Joachim Schellnhuber and Katja Kipping at the Conference "Genug für Alle□"Sozial.öko.logisch,"* 2017). Due to this form of censorship, the GT debate is structurally limited to reach both the larger public or mainstream politics[187]. A way of mitigating this type of censorship and percolate the larger societal and political arena in the GT debate has been through catalytic intervention initiatives, harnessing contingent opportunity-windows: *Energiewende*, for example, resulted from the bottom-up structural set-up over three decades meeting the chance opened by Fukushima. Degrowth creatively harnessed the context of economic crisis and the momentous debate

[187] For a further development of these ideas, see the section on 'Obstacles to a fused performance' at the end of this chapter.

on transformation, and the UBI proposal relies on a cross-party proto-alignment in the face of a perceived as inevitable shrinking of the job-market.

Transformative agents can thus learn the following from the GT debate in terms of turning hermeneutic power in favor of transformative learning: First, fostering a culture of deliberation and transformative literacy can be fostered as a structural enabler for learning. Secondly: a combination of high-impact interventions (e.g. a bestselling book) with a decentralized production of discursive dispositifs (grey literature, life or virtual forums, etc.) for discursive balance combines visible guidelines for interpretation with structural balancing through embeddedness into a textual-web, thus distributing hermeneutic power. Thirdly, catalyzing intervention initiatives are required to circumvent the inherent structural constraints (which can be understood as a diffused form of censorship), which requires identifying structural windows of opportunity and creative strategic framing.

Table 10: GT Articulation Discourse-hermeneutic power

Disruptors ('unbuilding unsustainability')	**Generators ('building sustainability')**
• Established deliberative culture • Decentralized symbolic production implies structurally decentralized hermeneutic power • High-impact interventions offering hermeneutic alternatives (affirmative action)	• Transformative literacy • Catalytic intervention proposals as focal points for conversation, thus limiting censorship (Energiewende, UBI, etc.)

By way of conclusion regarding the role of social powers in successful discourse- or cultural performance: A combination of various forms of *shielding* (from economic, political, and cultural constraints) with some form of *leverage* (over the field of discourse) would allow transformative agents to circumvent constraining powers and produce a positive contribution to the emergence of social-ecological utopias through fostering (counter-hegemonic) discursive creativity, enabling widespread and synchronic symbolic dissemination, or distributing hermeneutic power. Civil society organizations are particularly well-suited to combine these three forms of symbolic power:

> through their influence on public opinion, through their structures, through their public impact and their political influence, they can develop new concepts and risk new visions, they can demonstrate the alternatives to 'further, faster, more' in practical projects, they can set the

> tone within their own sphere and engage their members as agents for sufficiency. At the same time, they can put a spoke in the wheels of the ideology of escalation; they can win time by means of blockades, create public pressure for a complete re-think, and push through alternative solutions to problems – especially through public participation. They can help to transform a resigned sense that 'there is no alternative' into an inspiring belief that 'another world is possible' (Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014, p. 142)

As per our review, all three dimensions of symbolic power are critically linked to the capacity and the conditions for material self-reproduction of transformative agents. Practices that could be purposefully undertaken to foster conditions of sustainable self-reproduction of transformative agents as per the above insights are related to the sources and the conditions of funding: a relatively stable, tax-based, or decentralized funding structure is a precondition for transformative agents' material independence and security. While independence is important to limit the domination of mainstream discourse, security is functional to the capacity of utopian creation and the implicit risk-taking (Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014, p. 142). As observed in the GT debate, large non-for-profit organizations with economic, social, or cultural leverage are uniquely positioned to this purpose. Such structures are not necessarily replicable in other contexts, however: the case of church-tax, for example, is unique to Germany in international comparison, and has deep historical roots that can be traced back to the Holy Roman Empire. However, more easily replicable structures could be put in place in substitution: large-scale fostering of P2P collaborative platforms, structural promotion of voluntary work, maybe potentiated through combination with a sensible and holistic time-policy, particularly in relation to waged working-time, would be conducive to strengthening the resilience, risk-taking capacity, and transformative leverage of civil society organizations and networks. Proportional increase in public funding, targeted project-commissioning by the state, and other forms of state-driven material stimuli work to similar avail.

Credibility and legitimacy of discursive agents

Even if the means of symbolic production (distribution and interpretation) are sufficient, the narrative a powerful one, and the *mise-en-scène* skillfully set in place, there is no guarantee that the performance will succeed. There remains the extraordinary challenge of acting it out. (J. C. Alexander, 2004, p. 559). We can name this challenge raising *credibility*. A first source of credibility is the degree of *authenticity* the audience would ascribe to the performance. In everyday life and common language, a person is deemed authentic if he or she is "real, straightforward, truthful, and sincere"; if his or her "actions

appear sui generis, the product of a self-generating actor who is not pulled like a puppet by the strings of society" (J. C. Alexander, 2004, p. 548).

Let us start by looking at the main factors disrupting the credibility of the Brundtland-consensus on SD. With regard to the comparative drag-over effect of past performances, the increasingly apparent failure of ecological modernization approaches to bend deleterious social-ecological trajectories reinforce the sense of authenticity of 'transformation' as an emerging paradigm (Brand, 2016c).

In addition, the image of authenticity of mainstream SD-advocates is impaired through a fracture in intra-elite consensus: Even if the WBGU's proposals fall short of fundamentally challenging the dominant nature-society relationship and the role of capitalist markets, its dramatic description of the ecological crisis alone is a sign of disruption (Brand, 2012a), which, as we saw, produced a bandwagoning-effect of all transformative forces. Also within the ruling coalition a fracture became exposed: neoclassical-neoliberals, 'business as usual' advocates showed divergences with part of the conservative factions (with the public figure of Meinhard Miegel as catalyzer) in the ruling coalition who acknowledge the interlinked and multidimensional character of the crisis and the need for fundamental transformations. Although the former remain dominant and set the tone of the official position, this arguably constitutes a significant political development. (Brand, Pühl, et al., 2013).

Another source of credibility is what we above referred to as the 'peninsular' as opposed to 'insular' character of GT-agents: it is not the excluded of society (only) who purport a GT-imperative, but some individuals and organizations enjoying a high level of social recognition, be it through institutional prestige attached to them (general academic qualification, representative character of e.g. a religious institution, etc.), or through the more particularized recognition awarded to personal or organizational trajectories (e.g. Wuppertal-Institute, Bread for the World, *Misereor*), to political or media-caché (e.g. H. Welzer, Katja Kipping, or M. Miegel), or to personal charisma (Pope Francis). The generally positive public image of NGOs (Kriegman, 2008) plays a similar function (Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014, p. 142). This is largely a result of the profusion of what scholars have called "shadow networks" or "insider-outsider networks", i.e. informal networks that work both outside and within the established system or symbolic order (B. C. Roberts & Parks, 2010; Gunderson1999; Olsson et al.2006; Westley and Vredenburg 1997, cited in Westley et al., 2011). The idea of a radical transformation appears more credible[188] to the larger public (in the sense of plausible) when it is

[188] The opposite thesis could be advanced, as well, namely that radicalism is more credible (in the sense of *authentic*) when it is embodied by non-mainstream actors. Yet in a pragmatist and cynical Western culture of late modernity, radical anti-systemic proposals from the margins of society are hardly taken

embodied by established and recognizable actors. This recognizability increases the symbolic compatibility of the GT discourse with aspirational status-symbols of intended audiences, generating "dramaturgical loyalty" (Benford & Hunt 1992, cited in Hajer, 2005). At the same time, the convergence of, say, hippie-style niches, hardcore left social movements, minimalistic young urban milieus, and scientific elites in international Degrowth conferences, for example, blurs identity boundaries and facilitates the emergence of a larger 'we'.

In addition to these 'soft' sources of social recognition, the starring role of science in the GT debate endows agents with the 'hard' and key resource of scientific *legitimacy*. Drawing on potentially disruptive theoretical concepts (planetary boundaries, Anthropocene, Great Acceleration, Jevon's and Easterlin's paradoxes, post-democracy, etc.) the scientific sphere plays a prominent role not only in unveiling the mechanisms and contradictions of the current symbolic order and its material support-infrastructure, but also in proposing ways out (e.g. shift in emphasis from *efficiency* to *sufficiency*). The danger of this legitimacy-monopoly of scientific knowledge is that it be played against the political, prompting a premature closure of debates about the desirability or convenience of a given course of action (Parker, 2015)(cf. Section 4.3 on Obstacles to a fused performance). However, the trend towards a 'democratization of science' – which is prominent in the GT debate –, on the one hand, and the growing normative implication of scholars in both cultural-political discourse production (e.g. Convivialist Manifesto), on the other, largely dilute this danger by loosening science's "monopoly over socially binding definitions of truth" (Beck, 1992), without science therethrough losing its aura of prestige.

Even though it does not play a high-profile role in the GT debate, the state similarly operates as a source of legitimacy through multiple forms of intervention: own content production (e.g. WBGU), creating platforms (*Enquetes*, SÖF), funding (DFG-Jena research consortium on post-growth, but also through fiscal structures), or else simply according institutional sponsorship. Also religion, despite having lost much of its prestige and influence, plays a legitimacy-transferring role, as we saw with *Laudato Si'*, but also through the cultural *agora* of catholic and protestant synods (*Katholikentag* and Evangelical *Kirchentag*), and the work of their development and social welfare organizations.

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seriously by larger publics. Credibility, in our connotation here, is linked more to *plausibility* than to authenticity.

Another way of 'hardwiring credibility' in the GT debate, as we saw in Chapter 3, is purposefully lying bridges between the radical 'non-existence' of social-ecological utopias and actually existing infrastructures, hence the relatively higher leverage of radical eco-social yet institutional-conservative approaches (as presented i.a. in Jackson, 2009a; Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014; Seidl & Zahrnt, 2010)
The GT debate illustrates two further useful mechanisms disrupting conventional associations between certain narratives and certain identity markers, which keep entrenched cultural and political rituals locked into stiffening antagonisms: First, we observe GT narratives embodied by '*unusual suspects*' (WBGU, 2014, p. 72): the engagement of figures such as Streeck, Schirrmacher, Miegel, Schellnhuber, Schneidewind, etc. even the Goethe-Institute through the project *Futureperfect* disrupt the established pattern of association between identity markers and narratives. A second mechanism are *changes in the conventional roles* performed by agents: examples are environmental circles taking up social perspectives and vice versa (Brand, Pühl, et al., 2013, p. 84), a mainstream newspaper like *The Guardian* instigating a campaign against the extraction of fossil fuels to protect climate stability[189], a catholic pope writing an 'environmental encyclical', the notions of a "transformative left" (as opposed to a conventional 'distributive left') or of a 'transformative science'.
Antagonism – or, more precisely, with Chantal Mouffe, *agonism*[190] – can however also lend the GT discourse credibility: indeed, since "what does not exist is in fact actively produced as non-existent, that is, as non-credible alternative to what exists" (Santos 2006, p. 15), also non-advocates can enact

[189] Cf. https://www.theguardian.com/environment/series/keep-it-in-the-ground

[190] In the theoretical categories of Chantal Mouffe (2007), this implies a shift from (anti-political) antagonism to political agonism. In her political theory, Chantal Mouffe (2007) takes distance from the conventional view of an irredeemable antagonism as inherently constitutive of the political: both conflict and hegemony are constitutive of the political; yet this does not imply that conflict would lead to the negation of the adversary. Mouffe redefines the dichotomy us/them resorting to the notion of "constitutive exteriority" (similar to Butler's hetero-determination), which defines how the idea of the 'other' is constructed: if seen as a 'legitimate other', the antagonistic relationship can be tamed and turned into what Mouffe calls agonism. The enemy becomes an adversary, and even if the conflict is not rationally resolved (the possibility of rational consensus would be but an illusion of liberal political culture), it is legitimated, thereby preventing the political bond from dissolving. Acknowledging agonism as a struggle for hegemony with no rational solution, the important thing, from a democratic vantage point, becomes the generation of legitimate channels for political dissidence. The sidelining or negation of conflict is not only a hindrance to agonistic politics, but an incentive for the emergence of antagonisms that put democracy itself in peril, as currently attested by the revival of rightwing populisms in the global north

the performance of the GT by way of simply acknowledging the *entity* of counter-narratives, thereby rendering them visible or socially *existent*. For example, as we saw in Chapter 3, while the OECD and UNEP do not acknowledge (let alone engage with) their discussants, Ralf Fücks unwillingly breaks this production of the non-existence by confronting his opponents.

Table 11: GT Articulation Discourse-actor

Disruptors ('unbuilding unsustainability')	**Generators ('building sustainability')**
• Rupture in intra-elite discourse (visible in Enquete WWL and WBGU, etc.) • Failure of conventional SD approaches • Heterogeneous identity-groupings merging in GT-advocacy • Unusual suspects (Miegel, Schellnhuber, Goethe-Institute) & changes in conventional actor-roles (The Guardian Keep it in the Ground campaign; Laudato Si', etc.) • Production of in-visibility of alternatives broken: Antagonism → Agonism (e.g. Fücks)	• Political and social rehabilitation of radical system-critique ('peninsulas not islands') • Critical mass of influential publications from widely respected institutions (WBGU, UK commission on SD, Wuppertal Institut, etc.) and persons • Symbolic compatibility with aspirational status symbols (habitus) for alternative patterns of subjectivation and identity-ascription • Legitimacy transfers from widely recognizes authority-sources (science, state, religion) • Docking points with established ideational and material infrastructures

Receptivity of the discourse addressees

This last stage of our dramaturgical analysis raises the question of which factors affect the receptivity of the intended audiences of the GT debate. This last fusion is critical, since no matter how well staged the performance might be in terms of all previous steps, it will not enact performative fusion – that is: produce cultural extension effects in correspondence with the performed discourse – if it fails to reach its audience, i.e. to engage them psychologically.

First let us consider two types of factors which condition the general receptivity of the GT debate, regardless of the specific expectations and demands of particularized audience-groups. The first element are *contextual factors*. As we have considered these factors already, let us just focus here on their

effect on the audiences' receptiveness. At the bottom line, the GT meets as widespread demand for re-politization and political activation in a spatiotemporal juncture of a perceived system-crisis (whose precise contours vary according to specific diagnoses). For many culturally and politically engaged persons, the GT is already a big topic. They fill the conference rooms, participate actively in face-to-face or digital platforms by proposing, contesting, illuminating different viewpoints, etc.; they engage from their scholarly, professional, or activist work. In the mainstream, the Great Recession, the debt crisis, unprecedented socio-economic inequality, and aggravating global ecological crisis create momentum for deeper, more-than-incremental change, even if the basic socio-cognitive and cultural matrix of Western-style late modernity is not fundamentally challenged. Both spheres thus overlap to a greater extent and raise the stakes higher than was the case under the earlier Brundtland-consensus. The second factor are collectively *shared memories*. Shared memories have an audience-fusing effect. This idea has been conceptualized both by Alexander (2004) as *memory of earlier performances*; and by Garfinkel (1981; cited in Hajer, 2005), who coined the idea of *'contrast space'* vis-à-vis earlier successful discourses. As we found in Chapter 3, the ideational contents of the GT debate are mostly recycled from earlier discussions, especially from the system-challenging utopian discursive environment of the 1960s and 1970s in Europe: The MIT report to the Club of Rome on Limits to Growth (D. H. Meadows et al., 1972), the UN Conference in Stockholm 1972, the radical critique of capitalism (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005), but also some later discussions, such as discourse on post-normal science (Funtowicz & Ravetz, 1991, 1993; Gallopin et al., 2001), or the success of the anti-nuclear movement from the 1980s and culminating with the official state-led *Energiewende*. The WBGU's adoption of Polanyi's concept of the 'Great Transformation' can be seen in this light, as a way of harnessing Polanyi's newly gained academic prestige[191] (Hann & Hart, 2009; W. Sachs, 2013; Somers & Block, 2014). This endows the GT discourse with a sense of historical depth, *ad minimum*, and with a lived experience of success, in the best case. Conversely, the perceived historical record of success of the German model of the social-market economy is a strong fusion-hindering collective memory (Brand, Pühl, et al., 2013, p. 15) (see section on Obstacles below), although the progressive dissolution of the post-war class compromise in the context of an increasing financialization of the global economy (Brand, 2016a; Dörre, 2009; Streeck, 2013) can be expected to further weaken this narrative and reinforce system-critical ones, under the premise that 'what got us here will not take us there'.

[191] This has raised critiques, insofar the 2011 WBGU report does not endorse a substantial part of Polanyi's argument (i.e. the social-destructive effect of capitalist markets), but rather perverts it. (W. Sachs, 2013; Unmüßig et al., 2012)

Yet beyond these general appreciations, the act of reception is not that of a passive deciphering of the *mise-en-scène*, but rather a co-production of meaning in terms of the psychological-emotional engagement that the performance enables on the part of the audience(s). Alexander calls this *catharsis*. The audience to which the performance is targeted is not an innocent spectator: his or her own worldviews, cultural understanding and socio-structural placement shape his/her response. Hence, for the purpose of discussing the receptiveness met by the GT debate further, we need to distinguish concrete audience-groups, i.e. the diverse agent-arenas identified in the first part of this chapter. Yet first we ought to ask: who are the addressees of the GT discourses? The addressee appears rather blurred: It is not primarily the government or some international governance arrangement. Neither is it the citizenry at large, at least not *de facto*. To be sure, there are proposals involving all of these agents and beyond, but they are not addressed directly by the flows of communication. From our empirical inquiry, there emerges no clear-cut distinction between actors and audiences; instead, GT-agents rather seem, to a large extent, to be addressing each other within a closed loop. Audiences are mainly organizational actors (NGOs, think tanks, SMOs) or sub-public spheres (e.g. social-scientific debate, semi-public forums such as the *Kirchentag*). It is about defining and refining the own discourse, identifying potential allies, and working out needs for restructuration and intervention proposals. It is about 'getting fit' to eventually become transformative agents themselves. The implicit goal of GT participants seems to be an impulse towards self-reflection and a consequent self-transformation of participating agents. This matches – even if only incipiently, in sub-cultural spheres – Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens' vision of a reflexive modernity (Beck, 1992; Beck, Bonss, & Lau, 2003; Beck, Giddens, & Lash, 1994).

In Chapter 1 we posed the problem of audience fragmentation (orthogonal sub-cultures, multiple public spheres) (Fraser, 1992) as a major challenge blocking the way towards fused performances. We argued that this fragmentation is accentuated in the case of broad-purpose discourses, such as the GT. However, a paradoxical double-effect can be observed in GT performances: On the one hand, due to the abovementioned self-referential character of the debate leads to group-affirming performances, hence more prone to produce dramaturgical fusion than performances addressed at the larger public. Indeed: despite the transversality and holism of the discourse-content, many GT-agents seem to have built individual and group-identities around their respective discursive project, as showcased by the Degrowth movement, for example. By implication, the above referred self-reflection and self-interpellation exercises take place within the protected environment of a new symbolic space defined

around the self-identification as 'change agents' or, as we called them, 'transformative agents'. This enables a stronger cathartic and thus co-productive engagement with the GT discourse, as we saw above. On the other hand, however, as we saw in Chapter 3, the GT is a meta-debate actually connecting a range of tendentially fragmentary sub-discursive fields. Even if it is often scholarly analysts who have lumped these arenas together under the overarching banner of the GT, the empirical debate has also been proven to span across (sub-groups of) these arenas. Let us thus review how this fragmentary landscape is empirically bridged in the GT debate.

The main observed mechanism is the building of new discursive arrangements across hitherto separate discursive fields. This enabled the recognition of mutual interdependences and the emergence new discursive coalitions or at least of discursive affinities. This reach-out motion of discursive agents can itself be regarded as an indicator of a disruption in the prevalent symbolic order (i.e. the Brundtland consensus); as a result, previously unimaginable alignments appear possible, and new discursive strands emerge to lay bridges between hitherto disconnected or even contentious discursive positions: a systemic socio-ecological activism, a conservative degrowth-strand, a movement for the 'democratization of science', etc. The role of agency in bridging socially and culturally fragmented audiences by means of meaning-brokerage and translation (Santos, 2004), including extended opportunities for symbolic identity-ascription (e.g. through 'shadow networks'), as discussed above, led to the creation of networks among unlikely (or at least unusual) partners. Noteworthy fusions across audience-groups observed in the GT debate are:

- Fusion between political elites and their constituencies advances insofar elites develop greater sensibility to the more transformative or "advanced demands" from within the constituencies, instead of continuing to rely on lowest-common-denominator politics (WBGU, 2014, p. 113), as visible most clearly, perhaps, in the emergence of a 'transformative left'.
- Fusion across political-ideological spectrum: In Chapter 3 we learned that the GT debate shows potential for discursive alignments between conservatives and liberals in the right and the left, respectively, in that they share anti-productivist, anti-capitalist, or anti-utilitarian critiques (Felder & et. al, 2012; Latouche, 2009, p. 94).
- Fusion of social and environmental activism, and potentially, through narratives such as the "imperial ways of life", also of north and south activism, as their respective problems are reframed as two sides of the same coin (Acosta, 2014; Brand, 2015; Dietz, 2014)

- Fusion of old and new social-ecological emancipatory discourses: For example, the older sufficiency discourse (first advocated by Wolfgang W. Sachs, 1994) merges with a re-emerging growth-critical current in the 2010s (Holzinger, 2016)
- Fusion between NGOs and social movements: As we saw in the first part of this chapter, the 2009 UNFCCC COP 15 in Copenhagen led to the globalization-critical left taking ownership of the ecological crisis; the Mc Planet congresses united alter-globalization movement, developmental, environmental, and religious NGOs. Degrowth appears as *rendezvous* place for anti-systemic, emancipatory movements (Network *Wachstumswende* and *Degrowth in movement(s)* (Konzeptwerk Neue Ökonomie e.V. & DFG-Kolleg Postwachstumsgesellschaften, 2017; Misereor & IHS, 2013, p. 12)
- Fusion of global activism and religion: The GT discourse foresees potentially global "alliances of solidarity" among religious actors with like-minded CSOs and social movements, drawing on successful experiences of the past, such as the Jubilee 2000 campaign for the relief of sovereign debt of the poorest countries in the world. This would constitute a singular value-added for the governance of wicked global problems (Johannes Müller, cited in Misereor & IHS, 2013, p. 27)
- Fusion of general-interest and particular-interest groups: political party representatives, trade unions, religious actors, and NGOs showed discursive affinities in convergent forums (Heiligendamm 2007) and concrete collaboration in joint publications (Felder & et. al, 2012) or jointly organized events (2012 Transformation Congress)
- Fusion of civil society and science, and both with (sub)politics (A. Zahrnt, cited in Kristof, 2010, p. 15), as exemplified in the Degrowth movement or in the civil society platform *Forschungswende*.
- Fusion of the natural sciences and the social sciences: as showcased by the emergence of 'transformation science' and 'transformative science', or internationally the Future Earth platform.
- Fusion across policy fields: most clearly visible in the emerging field of time-policy (labor, consumption, product warranty, etc.) (Reisch & Bietz, 2014)
- Generational fusion: between old and young activists, as reported about the Heiligendamm conference in 2007 (Brand, 2014a)

Worthwhile noting, lastly, is that many of the above indicated fusions arose not from the abstract desire to reach out for the other, but of the need to align the other for the purpose of advancing concrete plans and actions. Be it the need for legitimacy (provided, for example, by civil society to science in *Forschungswende*), the need for the activating force of the state (*Energiewende*), or the need for a critical mass (Degrowth movement, the UBI-agenda), or the need to co-shape emerging agendas (the trade unionist 'Just Transition')

Table 12: GT Articulation Discourse-audience(s)

Disruptors ('unbuilding unsustainability')	**Generators ('building sustainability)**
• Generalized perception of system-crisis raising stakes higher and creating greater overlap among audiences • Status-quo-prone discourses anchored in shared collective memories ('model Germany') progressively loosening strength in the context of dissolution of post-war class compromise and emerging TDs • Growing (sub-)cultural disposition towards self-interrogation (reflexive modernity)	• Historical discursive references (Limits to Growth, Convivialism, post-normal science, etc.) and experienced TD-'success' stories (e.g. alter-globalization movement, anti-nuclear movement) • GT as rendezvous point for green, red, religious discourse, social-moral conservatism; and lever for re-politization and political activation • Emerging transversal discursive arenas across hitherto separate discursive formations, allowing for: - re-alignment of discursive coalitions or at least of discursive affinities - larger, more open and inclusive identity definitions • Cathartic role of GT discourse for specific group-identities • Catalytic & clustering initiatives and practices (UBI, Energiewende, Transition Towns, etc.)

Obstacles to a fused performance of the GT discourse

We just analyzed the 'breakthroughs' in transformative meaning-making, as this is the focus defined by our research question. But, of course, the obstacles hindering progress towards a GT are worth considering, as well, insofar they set structural limits to the above identified enablers. Following structural hindrances were systematized from the coded data:

Ideational path-dependencies and locked-in dramaturgies: The still prevalent Brundtland consensus (whose latest avatar are the UN SDGs) keeps large parts of the debate blind to unquestioned assumptions and firmly anchored in a fixed, path-dependent frame of problem-definition and problem-solving, which "have produced their own dramaturgy, one in which the *dramatis personae* is well known and the different actors play their roles from a generally known script" (Hajer, 2005, p. 642). As a result, all observed deficiencies in the road to 'sustainable development' are attributed to a 'practical gap', either between policy- or institutional design and implementation, or else between individual knowledge/values and action (cf. Introductory chapter). The discourse on transformation risks becoming absorbed into this centripetal movement, yet another buzzword, another empty signifier in the sterile historical trail of sustainability (Brand, 2016c; Kühne, 2013). Indeed, while the problems associated with the prevailing societal structural dynamics are (marginally) acknowledged, they are not treated analytically, i.e. how these dynamics are produced and reproduced, and how to approach them. Furthermore, while the dominance of technically framed win-win solutions where conflict was hardly acknowledged (or else endowed with a negative connotation) has given way to a more politicized vision with culprits and victims, these discursive strands still largely talk past each other, with scarce signs of cross-pollination. The only conflict broadly acknowledged is between the overconsumption of resources and dumpsites by the north versus the demands and expectations of rapidly emerging countries in the south (Brand, 2014d, p. 247)

Earlier memories of success: The ordoliberal social-market economy ('model Germany') sustained a (perceived as) mutually beneficial post-war class compromise for over half a century (Streeck, 2013). For the conservative political forces currently in power, this economic model is historically legitimated and thus beyond discussion. Hence for the political left (red-red-green), the question arises to what they can afford to engage in redefinition struggles around development, welfare, and the good life (Kühne, 2013, p. 84). For the time being, this keeps politics locked into business-as-usual and austerity policies with a strong market- and pro-economic growth orientation.

Lack of broad soundboard in society: Closely linked to the above, neither the structure-conservative concept of a 'Green New Deal' nor the more challenging ‚notions of a profound social and ecological reconstruction encountered a wide (civil) society soundboard or a firm practical anchor (Felder & et. al, 2012, p. 18). Even though environmental consciousness in Germany is considered high, an actual broadly anchored transformative consciousness or policy, which, in practice, do not play the social and the ecology against each other, is not yet in sight (Felder & et. al, 2012, p. 3). This is reinforced through the aforementioned fragmentation of GT-addressees in multiple, partly conflicting sub-

cultures, and public spheres.

Organizational, institutional, and ideological fragmentation in civil society and science: The progress indicated in the previous section in this regard notwithstanding, the lack of trust and networking between the NGOs and grassroot actors of civil society remains a major blockade to transformative movement-building, both in terms of efficacy and of legitimacy. The NGO-scape disconnected from social movements is increasingly questioned with regard to whose interests they represent. (Re)connecting civil society agents across the spitted fields of food, energy, and climate, a separation that evolved from decades of solo thinking, is imperative for the activation of civil society as a political force (Germanwatch, 2012, p. 13; Narberhaus, 2013; Unmüßig, 2014). In the scientific sphere, ideational and institutional barriers which transverse disciplines and sectors continue to structurally hinder dialogue and collaboration. (BMBF, 2012)

Political activation under conditions of pluralism and power decentralization: The more distributed social power becomes, the rarer the event of a successful dramaturgical fusion. As discussed before, with regard to sustainability/ transformative learning process, this is a matter of phases: the deconstruction of the mainstream SD consensus (de-fusion) is a necessary moment to block its cultural extension or reproduction (J. C. Alexander, 2004, p. 563), thus allowing a new (likely more pluralist and therefore more difficult) "transformative consensus" to arise in a second moment. As acknowledged in Chapter 1, because achieving fusion under conditions of greater plurality is more difficult, the role of agency acquires even more prominence.

Structural limitations of the public sphere: News shine for a while under the spot of media and are perceived as important by the public at large, changing perceptions and behaviors, and gaining political relevance and sometimes leading to reforms, but only insofar the topic remains news-relevant: as soon as the spot is off, the perception arises that it has lost importance. And this up-and-down dynamics has characterized the dictates of public opinion since the bourgeoise revolutions of the 18th century (Stengel, 2011, p. 315). Conversely, long term, diffuse, and complex problems which confront our own constituency as societies and individuals are not amenable to the typical dynamics of news. This means that the GT is not only unprecedented as political challenge in the managerial sense, but also in terms of its political-democratic legitimation mechanisms. This both explains and makes the case for the fact that the GT discourse evolves in a dialectical movement between elite-circles (in the symbolic rather than in the material sense) and radical activism, while larger societal circles remain sidelined.

'Aura' of science as a double-edged sword: The role of science as social-ecological watchdog has been

repeatedly emphasized here. Yet, at the same time, scholars may deploy the key resource of scientific legitimacy in the opposite sense, preserving the status quo: this has become ingrained into the current societal dynamics at least in two ways: first, when 'expert' knowledge is invoked to prematurely foreclose political debates about the feasibility, desirability, or convenience of a given course of action (Parker, 2015), or else to keep scientific (turned into public) controversies artificially alive, thus blocking transformations in the name of scientific certainty, and at the expense of reasonable doubt, as the case of 'climate skeptics' or 'deniers' exemplarily shows (Latour, 2004) (cf. Excursus Chapter 2)

4.4. Synthesis: the role of agency in the GT debate

The above description of GT-enablers may appear negligible against the weight of structural obstacles facing the prospects for a global social-ecological transformation. This would arguably be a fair appreciation. Our goal, however, was not to show that the GT debate is effecting or will ever drive large-scale societal changes in and of itself; rather its analysis had the purpose of illuminating pathways which – potentiated by a widespread enough and deliberately fostered reproduction of transformative agency – could eventually kick-start and drive societal learning-processes toward a transformation. The importance of macro-historical, contingent, material-structural factors notwithstanding, the study of the GT debate showed that the role of agency is central in creating and sustaining the discursive dynamics, as well as for the prospects of it unleashing strong waves of cultural transformation. The key agency-practices observed can be grouped according to the challenges in the GT debate they help offsetting:

a. *Complex and diffuse character of the GT debate*: The connection of all sub-discourses (axial themes) of the GT debate in a meta-discourse is neither self-evident nor spontaneously self-organizing. Only the hermeneutic role of "meaning-making elites" allowed to stitch these diverse discussions into a holistic futuring-debate about sustainable societies. These meaning-makers raise questions to trigger collective reflection processes, create new narratives thus offering a 'blueprinting' instance which becomes object of debate, and provide clues and substantial inputs to filter, organize and interpret the overwhelmingly complex and abundant information, as well as orientation for action.

b. *Dispersion of the audience*: As we saw during our theoretical inquiry in Chapter 2, agency plays a key role fusing audiences in broad-purpose discourses which draw disparate social groupings into a single discursive arena. The GT debate was shown to span across multiple spheres, giving rise to a heterogeneous social field which creates structural conditions for alternative patterns of subjectivation and identitary ascription. Required here are of translation functions (to articulate the specific sub-cultural codes of the social groups involved), identity-brokerage (to facilitate mutual recognition processes), and circulation of knowledge and discourses to enable a conversation across the board.

c. *Inherently marginal condition of GT proposals*: By definition, the alter-systemic character of GT-proposals places them in a realm of societal non-existence. This not only makes it difficult for them to achieve fusion - as the resonance board would be the 'system' that is to be transformed, but often they lack minimal material preconditions for their production, diffusion, implementation. Some form of positive discrimination is thus required to spur their emergence into the space of existence: first, a large infrastructure of communication to act as communicating vessels working for aggregation of micro-experiments and diffusion of macro-elaborations (as provided distinctly by churches, development sector, specific state programs, research networks), and, second, a meso- and micro-level infrastructure for distributed implementations of the most varied sort: distributed network for energy generation, collaborative *prosumption*, fully-developed and affordable (or free) public transport in urban centers, food cooperatives, local money systems, UBI, etc. Targeted protection, nurturing, support, empowerment of concrete initiatives may be required, as well. Agency here necessitates agenda-setting power, requirements-mapping, institutional design, and large infrastructures (mainly communication networks and stable funding or self-reproduction mechanisms). It is hence a task chiefly for the state, but also for the churches and other agents with high capillarity communications infrastructure and large material resource-endowments. Another key resource with which these large agents can endow GT-initiatives to counterweight their marginal character is credibility (feasibility), authority, legitimacy.

d. *Structural inertias toward status quo* need to be counterweighted by transformative leadership. The GT debate has shown that symbolic action operates with relative autonomy of its 'social base' (J. C. Alexander et al., 2006), and that institutional agents can act freely and creatively within

the framework of their (relatively broad) cultural or political 'mandate'. The current juncture of structural imbalance working against transformative agents, however, means that strategy acquires central importance: this includes the holistic analysis of likely ripple effects, identification of key 'leverage points' (D. Meadows, 1999)(i.e. identify the 'battles worth fighting') and the best ways to harness them for learning/transformative purposes, the articulation of complementarities and the capitalization of synergies, and windows of opportunity presenting themselves. The case study also showed the importance of synchronic activation: should this not proceed spontaneously, a suitable agent could take up a coordination role. These strategic considerations pertain both the ideational and the material-practical dimension. In addition to strategic considerations, there remain the challenges of activation and management of transformative proposals.

4.5. Conclusions: structural enablers and key agency roles and practices in the GT debate

The whole purpose of analyzing the case of the GT debate was gaining insights that would help us understand the actual emergence of meaning-transformations and how this can be deliberately fostered. This concluding section seeks to synthesize the above analysis of 'partial fusions' into an integral picture showcasing the key enablers of the GT debate as a collective learning experiment towards a social-ecological transformation, and the key agency roles and practices therein, combining cultural, situational, agential, material-power, and audience-fusing perspectives.

The GT debate finds resonance mainly with the social-ecological discursive avant-garde in German culture, in the broader context of a favorably evolving cultural breeding ground (with a large generational component, according to polls). The sense of urgency sparked by the Great Recession to ignite the debate, and the growing meta-consensus about the systemic character of the contemporary *multiple interlinked crisis,* provided a common roof for an increasingly organic convergence of social and ecological activism, and for the growing engagement of scholars with system-critique drawing on historical precedents, especially from the 1970s, enabled the reproduction of the GT debate. The combination of the 'push' of a radical system-critique with the 'pull' of a (increasingly perceived as plausible) socio-ecologically embedded *good life utopia* creates a powerful combination to destabilize the dominant symbolic order. Furthermore, the GT discourses – through the various meaning-

combinations, drawing on 'meaning-surpluses' of established signifiers of modern culture, as analyzed in Chapter 3 – offer a plethora of docking points with culturally 'recognizable' discursive-ideational and material infrastructures, thus enabling the emergence of "real" or "concrete utopias".

In the perspective of its material reproduction, the GT debate feeds on a structural combination of *shielding* of discursive agents from economic, political, or cultural conformity pressures, with a certain degree of *leverage* over the cultural and political social-ecological debates. These structural preconditions depend, in turn, on specific features of institutional/organizational design and on a peculiar (inter-)institutional dynamics: the polyarchic symbolic production (made possible through the structural separation of material power from the power of symbolic production through a distributed communicational infrastructure), the intra-institutional mainstreaming of diversity (together with an inbuilt complexity- and long-term-orientation) and inter-institutional interdependent landscape are key shielding devices. The main structural levers identified are the enabling role played by empowered spaces such as the state or the scientific sphere (through both substantive inputs, the creation of protected spaces for experimentation, and legitimacy-transfer), the macro-economic leverage and high-capillarity infrastructure of large non-for-profit agents such as the churches, the academia, or the development sector. This infrastructure creates communicating vessels across the societal board, which enable a dialectical process of aggregation of micro-level experiences (e.g. grassroots' and niche-experiments with sufficiency-oriented ways of life) and diffusion of institutionalized patterns (e.g. the degrowth conceptual and theoretical framework).

Key is also the identity-profile(s) of GT-agents: unlike the usual counter-cultural agents, who develop an identity as system-marginals that blocks their channels of communication with the larger society they seek to address, the GT debate involves 'unusual suspects' who perform unconventional roles, thus breaking chains of equivalence that equate 'counter-cultural' with 'anti-social', 'fundamental transformation' with 'political revolution', and so on. Instead, the GT debate constitutes a melting-pot of identities, where intellectual and sometimes even political elites network with grassroots activists, trade-unionists, non-capitalist business entrepreneurs, and religious and NGO-representatives. The GT-sphere becomes itself a site to attain social recognition. Furthermore, all this increases the credibility and legitimacy of GT agents in the eyes of society at large.

With regard to bridging fragmented audiences, and closely linked to its high connectivity, the GT debate became a *rendez-vous* point for hitherto largely dispersed counter-cultural, system-critical, utopian discourses and struggles. While still satisfying the cathartic needs of these minorities, the GT remains 'peninsular' rather than 'insular' vis-à-vis the larger public sphere, thus avoiding the frustration

that comes with isolation. GT agents created unlikely bridges across fragmented audiences, showing that there is growing (sub)cultural readiness to self-interrogation and self-transformation.

The overall degree of fusion of GT performances becomes apparent in catalytic events and initiatives, be they deliberative events (Enquete WWL) or deliberation-catalyzing dispositifs (WBGU report, *Laudato Si'*), programmatic orientations ('transformative science'), or concrete intervention proposals ('non-reformist reforms': UBI, work restructuration, time-policy).

Agency was shown to play a fundamental role in advancing the GT debate. We categorized observed (in practice) and envisaged (in discursive representations) roles and practices according to the structural obstacles to the learning process they help offsetting:

a. Countering the complexity and diffuse character of the GT debates by providing crossover connection and catalytic instances, and through meaning-making agency: rising questions about the established order thus eliciting disruptive effects, creating new narratives (or else retrieving/ rearticulating forgotten or marginalized ones), interpreting the world and providing orientation for action.

b. Bridging fragmented audiences through broker-agents performing functions of translation (cultural, operational, etc. codes from diverse social groups or sub-systems), matching diverse identity profiles, spurring the circulation of TDs, articulating diverse discursive repertoires, capitalizing synergies, assisting in clustering and coalition-building, etc.

c. Positive discrimination or facilitation for sustainable ways of life creating structural and targeted fostering mechanisms. Both communicational and material infrastructure, as well as targeted support, are needed here. Capacities in point are agenda-setting, institutional design, and infrastructure provision. An additional effective form of positive discrimination is legitimacy (authority, credibility) transfer through institutional or individual sponsorship. The goal is to compensate for power, discursive, institutional-design imbalances.

d. Strategizing and activating transformative proposals to counter inertias towards the status quo: Windows of opportunity, leverage points, ripple effects, and holistic/systemic effect analysis (in as far as possible), as well as strategic synchronization, are hence key tasks of transformative agency, preceding those of activation and management of transformative proposals, taking advantage of catalyzing opportunities. The structurally disadvantaged leverage of

transformative agents vis-à-vis the status quo makes the optimization of efforts vital for advancing learning and transformative processes.

To what extent are the insights gained here about conditions of possibility for transformations in societal meaning-structures generalizable? Needless to say, many of the enablers (both 'disruptors' of the status quo and 'generators' of new virtuous visions and dynamics) identified here are rather particular to Germany; some of them can be extended to Western Europe or to the Global North, and yet others may be valid for other contexts, as well. The next chapter studies a contrasting TD-process in an extremely dissimilar setting: the Latin-American debate on *Buen vivir*, in order to put the findings of the present chapter into cross-territorial perspective. Both cases are then brought into resonance with each other (cf. Chapter 6), seeking to distil broadly generalizable conditions of possibility for transformative learning processes, which agents can draw on to advance a social-ecological transformation.

CHAPTER 5

Buen vivir as field of discursive representation and practice

Only by imagining other worlds will this one be changed
Alberto Acosta, 2010

5.1. Introduction to the *Buen vivir* debate

Buen vivir, as a contemporary social-ecological utopia, has become popular since its up-taking as a regulative ideal in the national constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia in 2008 and 2009, respectively. It can be regarded as a Latin-American utopia which is potentially global in outreach (Gudynas & Acosta, 2011b; Vanhulst & Beling, 2014a; Vanhulst & Zaccai, 2016). It can be broadly defined as a community-oriented cultural paradigm of social organization, based on a form of life that maintains a relationship of respect, harmony, and balance with everything that exists, understanding that everything is interconnected, interdependent, and interrelated (CAOI, 2008). Three dimensions are usually distinguished: harmony with oneself (identity), with society (equity), and with nature (sustainability)(Cubillo-Guevara, Hidalgo-Capitán, & Domínguez-Gómez, 2014). However, despite the concept of *Buen vivir*, in the singular, has become discursively stabilized, there is no such thing as a one univocal definition of the good life in this regulative ideal. Indeed, as *Buen vivir* (hereafter BV) became progressively anchored in the socio-cognitive and cultural landscape and in certain socio-political practices and institutions of the Andean-Amazonian region in Latin America, its content has diversified into a range of more or less (di)similar discourses articulated by the successive groups that have adopted and adapted it.

In order to account for this constitutive heterogeneity of the Latin American discourses of BV, diverse authors have proposed various typologies, such as: a culturalist, an ecologist, and an eco-Marxist current (Le Quang & Vercoutère, 2013); an indigenist, a socialist, and a post-structuralist currents (Vanhulst, 2015; Vanhulst & Beling, 2014a); an indigenist-pachamamist, a socialist-state-centric, and an ecologist-postdevelopmentalist currents (Cubillo-Guevara, 2016; Cubillo-Guevara et al., 2014), the 'buenos vivires', in the plural (Loera González, 2015), or the bifurcation between *Buen vivir* and *sumak kawsay* (Oviedo, 2014). Eduardo Gudynas (2011a) thus speaks of BV as a work-in-progress, as a dialogical platform, rather than a concept or a particular discourse. Hence, like the GT, *Buen vivir* can

also be conceptualized as a heterogeneous field of discourse. This lack of a precise definition of BV is probably also key to its magnetism and strength[192]. Yet as was the case with GT, as we will see, there is a distinctive common ground to all these BV-discourses, as well. I have argued elsewhere (Adrian E. Beling & Vanhulst, 2016b; Vanhulst & Beling, 2014a) that BV is usually understood – both in the academia as in public discourse – as the irruption of non-modern (traditional) ideational repertoires from indigenous communal cultures into modern ones, permeating the Andean-Amazonian territory outwards (*bottom-up* and *inside-out* process). Yet even if the role of local groups has been decisive, other actors have permeated the territorial context of emergence of BV from the outside, introjecting global discursive flows around development and sustainability into local processes by docking at local struggles (*outside-inward* process), giving way to the discursive construction of BV as a "retro-progressive modern utopia" rooted in the cultural traditions of the aborigine peoples of the Andean-Amazonian region, yet simultaneously embedded in global debates about alternative(s) (to) development(s)

> On the one hand, […] there is an ongoing dialogue with the indigenous cultural traditions, which can create or recreate new conceptualizations adapted to contemporary circumstances […]. On the other hand, this dialogue is intervened by some Western traditions questioning diverse assumptions of the dominant understanding of modernity. Among these we find alternative ethical positions which recognize legal rights to nature, contributions from feminism as a reaction to patriarchal domination, and new conceptualizations in areas such as justice and human wellbeing (Gudynas & Acosta, 2011a, p. 74)

BV thus constitutes a good example of '*glocal*' discursive articulation (bidirectional outside-inward and inside-outward process) in the search for alter- and post-developmentalist utopias, which appears an interesting object of study, beyond an area-studies perspective, for global debates around alternative futures (Adrian E. Beling et al., 2018). Furthermore, in terms of its ideational repertoire, BV constitutes a paradoxical construction, insofar it turns the hitherto allegedly incompatible cultural matrixes of traditional indigenous cultures and the modern paradigm of development into a source of cultural innovation and fundamental redefinition of the latter. (Carballo, 2015a)

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[192] Similarly to 'sustainable development', in the language of the Essex-school of discourse analysis (headed by Laclau and Chantal-Mouffe) BV can thus be conceived of as a "floating signifier". Like GT, however – and this is decisive – BV 'floats' at a different 'tide level': indeed, as has been argued elsewhere (Vanhulst & Beling, 2014a), the genesis of BV as an alternative to conventional development and to the contradictions of modernity makes it less amenable to stabilizing the status quo than the convergence-formula of sustainable development. (Vanhulst & Beling, 2014a)(Vanhulst & Beling, 2014a)(Vanhulst & Beling, 2014a)

Because the diverse meanings of BV clearly correlate with its successive stages of discourse production, both the pragmatic dimension of discursive practice and the diverse representations emerging therefrom are analyzed in parallel in the next section. Drawing on abundant secondary literature, as well as on own previous elaborations in diverse collaborative efforts, five different discursive strands were identified, corresponding to three different historical moments (*emergence*, *assemblage*, *dislocation*), which operated as spatiotemporal instances of re-signification of the concept of BV: we find a *primordial BV*, which was first articulated in the Ecuadorian Amazon and spread through the whole Andean-Amazonian region; a *hybrid BV* resulting from the constitutional process of political consensus-building in Ecuador and Bolivia; and, lastly, three re-articulations emerging from a process of (post-consensual) discursive dislocation: an *indigenous BV* advocated by many politically organized Latin-American indigenous movements; a *socialist BV*, which became the banner of the Ecuadorian and Bolivian governments and was conceptually developed by like-minded intellectuals; and a *post-developmentalist BV* rallying non-indigenous Latin-American social movements (particularly, the environmental movement) and an array of humanist, critical intellectuals with a global outlook. (Cubillo-Guevara, 2016; Cubillo-Guevara, Vanhulst, Hidalgo-Capitán, & Beling, 2018; Vanhulst & Beling, 2014b)

The chapter is organized as follows, seeking to parallel the analytical stages followed in the study of the GT debate: first, the general spatiotemporal and global context of emergence of BV is outlined as background reference. Next, a diachronic reconstruction of the BV debate in its material-pragmatic dimensions is offered, closing with an analytical synthesis of the discursive process. Section 5.3 goes on to systematize the discursive content of BV according to the five discursive strands just outlined. Then, Section 5.4 merges the two prior steps into a dramaturgical analysis, using J.C. Alexander's heuristic model, as we did with the GT debate. The chapter closes by systematizing key enablers, as well as agency-roles and practices distilled from the study of BV representations and practice and drawing general conclusions.

5.2. Context of emergence of the BV discourse

The landscape of Latin-American discourses around sustainability and development is difficult to understand without prior understanding of the geo-political and geo-economic entanglement of the

region throughout the second half of the 20th century; hence a brief overview thereof is in order as a starting point for the contextualization of BV.

Since the 1940s, most Latin-American countries have developed a critical stance towards the prevailing hegemonic equilibrium in the international order given the unbalances observable in the "Center-Periphery" relations, as portrayed in the geopolitical-historical hermeneutics of Dependency Theory[193] and Latin-American postcolonial theories[194]. This trend of thought was developed intermittently against the backdrop of recurrent right-wing military coups that scourged many Latin-American countries between the early 1930s and the late 1980s. The process can thus be characterized as a recurrent dialectic between leftist, dependentist/ anti-colonial views and both external and internal pressures to conform to dictates of world market and globally dominant development discourses.

How did Latin-America historically participate of the global SD debate? The emergence of environmental discourses in Europe and North America since the 1970s prompted some Latin-American progressive intellectuals to develop a critical stance with respect to global consensual positions on ecology and development. Worth mentioning are the *Latin-American Global Model* (or *Bariloche Model*) of 1976 (Herrera et al., 1976) in reply to the report *The limits to growth* (D. H. Meadows et al., 1972); and the report *Nuestra propia agenda sobre desarrollo y medio ambiente ("Our own agenda on development and environment")* (Comisión de Desarrollo y Medio Ambiente de América Latina y el Caribe, 1991), as the official position adopted by Latin-American countries *vis-à-vis* the Brundtland report and the Earth Summit in Rio 1992. In the intellectual sphere, prominent contributions are, among others, those of Arturo Escobar, Manfred Max-Neef, Gustavo Esteva, Victor Toledo, Enrique Leff, Alberto Acosta, and ─ more recently ─ the emergence of the *Buen vivir* discourse. (Vanhulst & Beling, 2014b; Vanhulst & Zaccai, 2016)

The BV discourse emerged at the turn of the century in a spatiotemporal context that can be characterized through the following descriptors:

The 'cultural turn' in politics and public discourse, and the mainstreaming of multiculturality as a global discourse since the 1970s through the expansion of so-called "New Social Movements" laid a breeding ground for recognition struggles of historically marginalized cultural and ethnic minorities;

[193] Represented *i.a.* by authors such as Raúl Prebisch, André Gunder Franck, Celso Furtado, Enzo Faletto, or else Fernando Henrique Cardoso.

[194] Represented *i.a.* by Aníbal Quijano, Walter Mignolo, and Enrique Dussel.

particularly, in many Latin-American countries, indigenous populations. Aborigine peoples are indeed progressively awarded increased political recognition worldwide, as attested, for example, by Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization in 1989 on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries, the report *Our Creative Diversity* by the Commission for Culture and Development of UNESCO in 1996, or the Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples by the UN, in 2007, together with akin constitutional reforms in fifteen countries (Adrian E. Beling & Vanhulst, 2016b). In Latin America, the rise of the Zapatista movement in Mexico in the mid-1990s (Brand, 2015, p. 26) and the 500 anniversary of America's 'discovery' by Christopher Columbus (Bretón, Cortez, & García, 2014; Cortez, 2010) led to particularly intense recognition struggles, resulting in a shift from ethnic minorities (indigenous especially) being regarded as *objects* of public policy to becoming political *subjects*. Cultural diversity progressively ceases to be framed as right of minorities to be replaced by a societal model of 'intercultural citizenship' (CAOI, 2008). This process was accompanied by a concomitant (re)structuration of civil society forces and capacity for collective action (see below the continentally relevant case of the Ecuadorian Indigenous movement)

Another relevant contextual marker is the renaissance of political discourses of the good life in the global North, which had been outcast from political philosophy since the Enlightenment (Bretón et al., 2014; Sandel, 2010). This renaissance has been explained as a product of the decreasing marginal utility of material affluence or even its decoupling from subjective wellbeing or happiness (Easterlin paradox), the post-materialistic turn, the 'cultural turn' brought about by the New Social Movements, among other things (cf. Chapter 3). The Western notion of development, which draws on the (universalistic) classical theories of modernity, starts to be questioned more fundamentally. Faced with the cumulative evidence of chronic socio-political, environmental and economic crises (persistent poverty, growing inequality, accelerated environmental degradation, etc.), all exacerbated by the generalization of neoliberal policies in the world since the 1980s, and the successful diversification of 'trajectories of development' (e.g. China and the BRICS) with the rise of the Global South (Nederveen Pieterse & Rehbein, 2009; Rehbein & Schwengel, 2008), a fundamental crisis of the "ideology of development" became apparent, leading to the emergence of post-neoliberal, post-colonial and post-developmentalist utopias.

The crisis of development as a normative ideal drew not only on the observed empirical failure of its implementation, but on critical reflection on the logic of the program itself. The diagnosis of *"maldevelopment"* or *"Mal vivir"* (Svampa & Viale, 2014a; Tortosa, 2009), a global systemic critique of

development blending elements of cultural alienation, socio-economic inequity, and ecological unsustainability (Amin, 1990) found wide reception in Latin-American countries scrounged by two decades of Washington-Consensus-type political economy. Merging these ideas with environmental thinking, the critical intellectual sphere in Latin-America further develops this diagnosis into a full-fledged philosophical critique of Western modernity, locating the ultimate causes of contemporary crisis not only in neoliberalism or capitalism, but in the dualistic ontologies of modern European thought – chiefly the society/nature dualism, and the monistic conception of rationality according to the Cartesian rationalist tradition –, the latest avatar of which would be the 'ideology of development'. This diagnosis, which found allies in the increasingly politically influential indigenous movements and in international environmental NGOs, supersedes that of a 'multiple interlinked crisis' uttered in the context of the GT debate, pointing at a deeper *civilizational crisis*. (i.a. Acosta, 2010b; Brand, 2015; Escobar, 2011, 2013; Estermann, 2012)

The transformative impulse incubated under the above conditions burst out at the turn of the century – in the heat of a juncture defined by the 'commodities-boom' shielding Latin-American economies from the Great Recession unfolding in the global North, which became progressively re-signified as 'anti-model' (Beck, 2015a), while the Washington Consensus being replaced by the "Commodity-Consensus" (Svampa, 2012): the governments of the region aligning behind a political economy based on large scale extraction of non-renewable natural resources to finance cash-transfers to low-income sectors of the population, which came to be known as *neoextractivism*[195]. Furthermore, the post-cold-war destigmatizing of the political left created a propitious context for the so-called "left-turn" or "post-neoliberal turn" in Latin-American politics (Beasley-Murray et al., 2009; Castañeda, 2006; Santos, 2006). In the Andean-Amazonian region, especially in Ecuador and Bolivia, the mainstreaming of the BV discourse was embedded in (and instrumental to) this process.

Yet similarly to the GT debate, the BV discourse did not emerge or spread through diffuse social interaction, but rather through the actions of concrete agents with specific goals and logics. But while the GT debate largely develops in parallel discursive arenas, whose interconnectedness under the umbrella of the 'transformation'-weaver came later and occasionally (cf. Chapter 4), the BV debate had a much more clear-cut processual character, univocally defined under the conceptual BV-header,

[195] Neoextractivism stands for the large-scale (and/or highly intensive) economic appropriation of natural resources (mainly oil in Ecuador and natural gas in Bolivia), giving place to so-called 'enclave economies' (or 'zones of sacrifice') to supply the global market.(Gudynas, 2011c; Svampa, 2012)

and with a more fluid inter-imbrication of the diverse participating agent-configurations: indigenous movements, other Latin-American social movements (with peasants and the environmental movement playing a pivotal role), international state-agencies and NGOs (developmental and environmental), political parties, state agencies and governments, intellectuals from the academia and occupying positions in the formal political systems, and a comparatively marginal role of religious currents of thought, chiefly Liberation Theology (Carballo, 2015a). Because of this greater inter-imbrication and processual character of the BV debate, the analysis of its historical unfolding below proceeds sequentially and integrating all these spheres, rather than dissecting them separately, as we did with GT.

5.3. Brief diachronic reconstruction of the BV field of debate

The genealogical reconstruction of the BV discourse distinguishes four phases: the longer incubation phase before the concept of BV was coined, which here covers all major ideational precedents (*ante litteram*), the prolegomenon to the instance of political assemblage, the consensus phase of constitutional and institutional reform, and the post-constitutional phase of discursive dislocation.

Ante litteram

Although there are no explicit references to BV (or its various equivalents in diverse indigenous languages) before the year 2000, a number of contributions can be identified from diverse currents of thought (in addition to indigenous ones) and academic disciplines such as philosophy, theology, anthropology, or even economics, which invoke values, principles and arguments discursively prefiguring BV, and which accumulated and articulated over decades (Adrian E. Beling & Vanhulst, 2016a; Belotti, 2014). The most prominent cross-articulation in the first half of 20th century was that between Marxism and indigenous cosmogonies, advanced by Peruvian politician and intellectual José Carlos Mariategui, and various figures at the Ecuadorian Socialist Party (Cubillo-Guevara et al., 2014). The socialist discourse in the Andean-Amazonian region has since, with successive shifts in emphasis, aimed at synthesizing ethnic and class-demands from the marginalized sectors of the population. (Cortez, 2010). In the second half of 20th century, the religious element was added to the equation by Liberation Theology, which purported a vision of compatibility between Christian and indigenous cosmogonies, based on the holistic view of harmony among people and with nature. As of the 1970s, this discourse was further intersected by environmentalism. In the global context of discursive tension between the Brundtland-vision of (weak) sustainability, which eventually prevailed, and counter-

hegemonic proposals setting on strong sustainability[196], such as *Ecodevelopment* (I. Sachs, 1980), the report *Waht now?* by the Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation (1975), or the report by the Founex Conference in Swizerland (1971), which would become a significant reference to the first Earth Summit in Stockholm, in 1972. Ecuadorian historian Vladimir Serrano saw the indigenous cosmogonies as a way out of the dichotomous relationship between ecology and economy, suggesting three guiding principles for any 'true development' proposal: environmental consciousness, holistic science, and intermediate technology (Cortez, 2010, p. 5). The ideational affinity of Serrano's view with the critical-utopian discourses in 1970s Europe that we saw in Chapters 3 and 4 (Illich, Gorz, Schumacher, etc.) should thus not come as surprise.

In the sphere of social movements, to be highlighted is especially the evolution of indigenous social movements from a largely undifferentiated unionist-peasant movement[197] with typical socialist demands in the decades 1920-30 (ethnic and ecological contents playing a fairly marginal role here) – towards the mainstreaming and systematic articulation of political and identitary demands in the 1970s (Altmann, 2015a, pp. 171–172; Becker, 2011, p. 51). The Ecuadorian Indigenous movement (hereafter EIM) is one of the most important social movements in Ecuador, and indeed in the whole of Latin America. Its importance resides in a noteworthy organizational and discursive development in the 1970s and 1980s that led to an effective bottom-up structure in the national indigenous organizations – and therefore a great potential for mobilization (see Section 5.5 regarding social powers, this chapter) – and to an innovative and coherent discourse around the central concepts of 'indigenous nationalities', that is, political entities with their own juridical, economic, and cultural structures, and

[196] This classical cleavage between sustainability discourses pits the view that so-called 'eco-systemic services' are irreplaceable, and their conservation, therefore, constitutes a non-negotiable political priority (strong sustainability), versus the view that the functionality ecosystems can be partially or totally replaced by man-made technology, giving way to possible trade-offs between (ontologically conceived as separated) environmental, social, and economic goals (Hopwood, Mellor, & O'Brien, 2005)

[197] Although it is mainly composed of indigenous peasants, who have made claims for land their central demand since its first manifestations in the 1920s, the bases of the indigenous movement are, from the beginning, very heterogeneous, ranging from traditional indigenous communities to agricultural workers who are semi-integrated into the market economy, small and medium traders, parts of an indigenous bourgeoisie, to groups living in the jungle and which are not integrated into the national society or the market. However, the sense of an indigenous 'we' has pervaded these social divisions, thereby explaining the political strength of the concept of 'indigenous nations'.

with the capability and right to autonomous self-determination in their territories within a *plurinational* state.

The up-taking of the idea of 'indigenous nationalities' as a political banner largely explains the rise of CONAIE – the Confederation of Indigenous Organizations of Ecuador – and its member organizations to hegemony within the EIM[198] (see Section 5.5 regarding fusion with contingent situation, this chapter). In the wake of this discursive shift, and drawing on indigenous traditions, the relationship between people and land was re-framed from a merely materialistic view of land as a factor of production to an ontologically redefined view whereby "land does not belong to people; it is rather people that belong to land". This 'cultural-territorial shift' materializes in CONAIE's 1997 reformulation of its political program[199], and later in its proposal for a law on biodiversity in 2004; the latter with an additional emphasis on the ecological dimension of the protection of indigenous territories, as a result of the engagement with the global discourse on sustainability. Furthermore, the emergence of 'counter-hegemonic' indigenous organizations during the second half of the 20th century (communist, catholic, protestant, etc.)[200] potentiated the creativity, resilience, articulation capacities, and strength of the EIM (Altmann, 2013a). In particular, the weakening of CONAIE at the turn of the century as a result of its close government-ties[201] led to a historically unprecedented post-hegemonic

[198] CONAIE had emerged as the leading force behind street mobilizations that repeatedly pulled down neoliberal governments. (Becker, 2011). By far the most important indigenous and one of the main social organizations not only in Ecuador, but in Latin America as a whole, and also allegedly the most inclusive. Alike FENOCIN, its seed-organizations were largely shaped by catholic anti-communism campaigns (with support from catholic missionaries). Its party *Movimiento de Unidad Plurinacional Pachakutik Nuevo País* (MUPP-NP) features the largest parliamentary representation of indigenous and social movements in Ecuador.

[199] The text repeatedly refers to a 'way of life' which can be traced back to the "cultural values" and the "cultural and spiritual richness" of the worldview of Ecuadorian indigenous peoples and nations. Highlighted features of this 'way of life' are "integral humanism", "communitarism", "plurinational, communitarian, and participative democracy", "plurinationality", "interculturality", "self-determination", "sovereignty", "independence", "international solidarity", among others. (Cortez, 2010, p. 9)

[200] The influence of religious organizations was exerted also via the work of "indigenous pastoral work", especially in the province of Chimborazo (Cortez, 2010, p. 10).

[201] The referred ties pertain the participation in the government of Lucio Gutierrez (2002-2003), first, and later by its power struggle for the representation of the indigenous population with the emerging party-movement *Alianza País* headed by current Ecuadorian president Rafael Correa.

situation within the EIM (Altmann, 2013a, p. 28). In addition to this relative power loss, the confrontational and allegedly conflational ethnic drive of CONAIE's concept of 'plurinationality' prompted other organizations representing the indigenous and other ethnic minorities (such as afro-descendants) to successfully establish counterproposals: so FENOCIN and later also FEINE – together with CODAE (Afro-Ecuadorian Development Corporation)[202] – endorsed the more open concept of *interculturality* as a challenge to *plurinationality*[203], creating convergence toward the lowest common denominator of the EIM, thereby opening its path to prominence within the post-neoliberal context of the Ecuadorian "citizen revolution".

Prelude to the processes of constitutional reform (2000-2008)

In the prelude to the emblematic processes of constitutional reform indicative of a political and cultural shift in the region (particularly in Ecuador and Bolivia), and in the framework of a process of critical self-reflection in the Western world around the worn-down idea of development (especially the idea of an exogenously steered development) pushed the international development sector into seeking to reestablish legitimacy through cross-pollinating connections with local cultures. And so indigenous intellectuals, in cooperation with some international development agencies, embarked in a process of restating traditional cultural elements from the aborigine peoples and their way of life as a basis for articulating an alternative understanding of development.

First efforts at discursively articulating BV can be traced back to some *kichwa* communities in the Ecuadorian Amazon – particularly the community of Sarayaku – during the 1990s.

This discursive construction, which can be lumped together under the kichwa term *sumak kawsay*[204], was the first version of the Latin-American *Buen vivir* (Cubillo-Guevara & Hidalgo-Capitán, 2015;

[202] For a detailed account of the diverse indigenous organizations in Ecuador and their historical development, see Altmann (2013a, 2015a)

[203] *Interculturality* emphasizes the defense of collective rights, but withdraws the ethnic and territorial emphases of *plurinationality*. Non-indigenous ethnic minorities which do not form nations themselves, as many indigenous peoples do, thus saw interculturality as a common ground, and a rectification of the implicit discrimination contained in the political claim for a plurinational state.

[204] This discursive construction, which drew on the *shiir waras* of the Achuar and the *penker pujustin* of the Shuar, researched by anthropologists such as Descola and Mader, was later diffused and adopted

Viteri, 2002a), therefore named here *primordial BV*. As a joint-venture of an array of international organizations and indigenous intellectuals, it can be understood as an elite-construction, through one attentive to the everyday life of indigenous communities. This explains, at least in part, why in the critical academic literature it is this 'alternative' character of BV that is highlighted vis-à-vis the historical hegemony of the modern Western concept of development, which is framed as anthropocentric and build on a dualist system of ontological and epistemic antagonisms (Acosta, 2013; Dávalos, 2008).

This *'glocal'* discursive co-production of BV was instrumental to its rapid diffusion across the region. The German cooperation agency GTZ (later renamed GIZ, *Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit*), and the Goethe-Institute, for example, played pivotal role in the early stages through the organization of discussion forums and diffusion across their dense network of partners. Well documented events are, for example, the program *Suma Qamaña* in Bolivia, developed and conducted jointly by GTZ and the Bolivian Federation of Municipal Associations in the framework of a World Bank-sponsored national consultative process under the rubric *"Diálogo Nacional 2000"*, where the Aymara intellectual elite (led by Javier Medina and Simon Yampara) coined the concept of *Suma Qamaña*, spreading it throughout Bolivia and the continent (Medina, 2001), or else the GTZ-organized 2002 Symposium on Development Cooperation in Panama, where early definitions of the 'primordial BV' are developed and formally translated into Guaraní and Kichwa language (*ñandereko* and *sumak kawsay*) (GTZ, 2002). In Ecuador, *sumak kawsay* began to spread through the public leverage of a handful of prominent public figures in the media (Viteri, 2002b) and in leading positions of the EIM (Sarayaku, 2003), on the one hand, and internationally and politically active scholars with a strong ecologist drive, on the other. (Acosta, 2002)

As this *primordial BV* was progressively adopted and adapted by diverse social groups and organizations (both domestic, especially indigenous and peasant organizations, and foreign developmental and environmental NGOs), there arises a 'creative tension' between tendencies towards territorialization – particularly in relation to rural and peripheral areas, in the context of struggles

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by other indigenous intellectuals and social groups, translated respectively as *suma qamaña* (Aymaras in Bolivia), *ñandereko* (Guaraní), *küme mongen* (Mapuche), *allin kawsay* (Peruvian indigenous movement), among others.

against oil extraction, as recorded in the Sarayaku Manifesto (2003) – and de-territorialization in the focus of these debates[205].

The mainstreaming of BV in the formal political sphere takes off with its decided adoption by the EIM, starting with the incorporation into CONAIE's political project (progressively shifting emphasis from local and rural towards national politics and international north/south articulation), and into the strategic plan of CODENPE, a state development agency under the control of indigenous organizations. Beyond the indigenous world, the National Committee for the Renewal of Socialism in Ecuador elaborated a project based on indigenous cosmogonies as a basis for a broad socio-cultural utopia, seeking to oppose a viable alternative to the then prevailing neoliberal orthodoxy. Cultural diversity and a harmonious relationship with nature become central categories. (Cortez, 2010, p. 15)

In this period, BV also starts becoming mainstreamed into cultural institutions: in 2004, the Intercultural University *Amawtay Wasi* adopted *Sumak kawsay* as a foundational principle, and a widely diffused Handbook of Political Education by Enrique Ayala Mora portrayed ongoing cultural and political reconfigurations as a time of "profound historical transformations", where diversity would become the cornerstone of a "renewed national project", after centuries of homogenizing pressures under the concept of *mestizo*[206] society (Cortez, 2010, p. 7)
Finally, in 2006, *Alianza País* emerges in Ecuador as a political party-movement catalyzing all counter-hegemonic forces and adopting BV as a slogan (Alianza País, 2006: 3, 10). The stabilization of BV in the discourse of the EIM and the Ecuadorian political sphere, however, came only as a result of its political legitimation through the constitutional process. (Altmann, 2016, p. 58)

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[205] From the early stages of the politization process of BV, it was framed as a process of building a plurinational political order. This is evident in the proposals for a new political constitution formulated by indigenous and peasants' organizations in Bolivia, or by CONAIE in Ecuador. BV thus appears as part of a political agenda that postulates plurinationality as the first feature that should characterize the State. In Ecuador, however, BV was appropriated earlier by the political sphere than in Bolivia – the party-movement *Alianza Pais*, which led Rafael Correa to the presidency, had already built its political program around BV in 2006, even before CONAIE presented its constitutional reform proposal in 2007 – meant that BV here displaced the claim to plurinationality of indigenous and popular organizations, which remained comparatively stronger in Bolivia. (Bretón, Cortez, & García, 2014)

[206] The Spanish word *mestizo* means the ethnic and cultural hybridation of indigenous and Spanish, of the colonized and the colonizers.

Constitutional reforms and institutional and programmatic materializations (2007-2009)

The discursive construction we called *hybrid BV* resulting from the Ecuadorian and Bolivian constituent debates is the product of an agential configuration made up of social movements, state, and academia imbrications (Vanhulst & Beling, 2014a). This configuration combines a) certain principles from the ancestral tradition of Andean-Amazonian aborigine cultures (advocated by indigenous movements) and the outcome of participatory processes inclusive of Latin American social movements (indigenous, Afro-descendants, peasants, unionists, feminists, etc.); b) the contributions of national and foreign development-critical intellectuals (from socialist and post-developmentalist currents), and c) the newly emerging national political elites in Ecuador and Bolivia. Especially worth mentioning among the non-indigenous influences of this *hybrid BV* are those of post-development, alter-globalization, eco-Marxism, environmentalism, feminism, and Liberation Theology. (Adrian E. Beling & Vanhulst, 2016a; Vanhulst, 2015)

In Ecuador, constitutional reforms are centered on the (not so clearly defined) inclusion of the aforementioned concepts of *plurinationality* (i.e. the reorganization of the State as multi-national entity, with each 'nation' being awarded territorial autarchy) and *interculturality* (i.e. the defense of collective rights without the ethnic and territorial elements) – both concepts in conflict between indigenous and Afro-descendant organizations (as the latter do not constitute 'nations') –; as well as the 'Rights of Nature' (Espinosa, 2015). In Bolivia, the most important innovation occurs in a deeper and more clearly defined conception of plurinationality, giving rise to the constitutional recognition of a plurinational state.

This phase is fundamentally characterized by the centrality of the State's role in the process of articulation and diffusion of the BV, as well as by a tension between the decolonizing forces (with a strong territorial focus) and the political pressure to adapt the BV to the worldviews, institutional structures, and policy-trends prevailing in the international arena. This tension resulted in some degree of cross-pollination, yet mutual vetoes between these contending strands impeded the *hybrid BV* from becoming a true 'alternative to development', as advocated by indigenous and some other social movements (feminists, decolonialists, environmentalists), and became rather equated with an abstract concept of 'welfare' (Cubillo-Guevara, 2016), and subsumed into a "bio-socialist-republican" matrix (Ramirez, 2010).

Post-constitutional phase

The 'forced consensus' implicit in the *hybrid BV* unleashed an increasingly intense struggle for the symbolic appropriation of the concept. With increasing ownership-taking of BV by the state, the *hybrid BV* grows increasingly conciliatory with modernist understandings of development, as clearly emanates, for example, from the National Plans for *Buen Vivir* 2009-2013 and 2013-2017 in Ecuador (SENPLADES, 2009, 2013), or from the Bolivian Human Development Report 2010, which highlights the necessity to connect the "normative horizons" of UNDP research in Bolivia, built upon Amartya Sen's and Martha Nussbaum's 'Capability Approach', and the ideas contained in BV or *Suma Qamana*. For the report, both 'frameworks converge in an ideal of development that transcends the material scope, and above all coincide in the principles of equality, respect and social recognition', overriding differences in the consideration of welfare (UNDP, 2010, pp. 49–51).

In the case of Ecuador, the government started to increasingly watering down the BV rhetoric, justifying the continuity of the economic model based on oil-exports under the premise that "extractivism is needed in order to leave extractivism behind" (Gudynas, 2012). The conflict over the Water and Mining Laws in 2008 opens a gap (which would increasingly expand) between official state- and indigenous politics, with the EIM accusing the government of launching an attack on the essential principles of *Buen vivir*. Indigenous organizations would be increasingly marginalized from key government projects (e.g. the emblematic Yasuní-ITT initiative, see Excursus below) and policies, or else play a merely legitimizing role *a posteriori* (e.g. in support of the proposed inclusion of so-called "Rights of Nature" in the Ecuadorian constitution) (Espinosa 2015). However, CONAIE (under the brand-new presidency of Marlon Santi, who had been one of the authors of the Sarayaku Manifesto/ cf. Section 5.3., prelude to the constitutional reform), decidedly took ownership of BV as identity-marker of the EIM. At the state level, however, the central advocates of BV – including Alberto Acosta, president of the Montecristi Constituent Assembly and former minister of Energy and Mines to the Correa Administration; and Mónica Chuji, former Minister of Communication and Spokesperson of the Ecuadorian Executive – distanced themselves from a government perceived as increasingly autistic and disconnected from the grassroots which had enabled its rise to power.

As of 2010, the relationship between the Correa-administration and the EIM had reached a breaking point, after which CONAIE spoke of the state as a "colonialist system that destroys mother Earth and overruns all our rights", and slammed Correa as a "false socialist, traitor, populist, genocidal fascist to the principles of *sumak kawsay*, accomplice of the colonialism of the 21st century" (CONAIE 2010,

cited in Altmann, 2013b). Meanwhile, in Bolivia the indigenous support to the Morales-administration becomes increasingly polarized between the unionized *'cocaleros'* (coca-peasants) and the communitarian indigenous groups (*'comunarios'*), particularly around the iconic TIPNIS conflict[207].
The ensuing struggles for the appropriation and resignification of BV in this phase yielded three main discursive strands: the *indigenist BV*, which prioritizes the retrieval and protection of an indigenous identity and their territorial autonomy, a *statist-socialist BV* prioritizing conventionally defined socio-economic goals in the (Western) liberal-socialist tradition, and a *post-developmentalist BV* prioritizing a social-ecological transformation (Cubillo-Guevara et al., 2018). Each of these discursive strands is advocated by a specific (group of) actor(s), seeking to strategically align BV with their own political goals in the context of a struggle for political hegemony in a post-neoliberal regional landscape.

Excursus: the Yasuní-ITT initiative

Yasuní-ITT is the iconic proposal coming from Ecuadorian civil society for breaking with the extractivist development model, which, as of 2007, was taken over by the government. This proposal is noteworthy because of its historically uniqueness and symbolic potential for balancing prevailing local/national and international/global interests regarding natural resources and the preservation of ecosystems in a novel, sustainable way, motivating an international discussion about a post-oil world (Alayza Moncloa & Gudynas, 2012; Arsel & Avila Angel, 2012). In a nutshell, the proposal consisted in the State refraining from allowing oil-extraction from the largest underground oil-reserve in Ecuador – the Ishpingo-Tambococha-Tiputini (ITT) area of the Yasuní National Park in the Ecuadorian Amazon rainforest –, thus preserving the biologically most diverse territory in the world, as a global public good. In exchange for keeping the oil in the ground, the Ecuadorian government demanded support for the initiative from the international community in amount of 50% of the would-be-revenues from oil extraction – in the original version of the proposal: 350 million US dollars per year for 10 consecutive years (Arsel & Avila 2012). The declared aim of the initiative was to

[207] The conflict emerged around a government plan to pass a highway across a protected natural area and autarchic indigenous territory (TIPNIS: Indigenous Territory and National Park Isiboro-Secure). The 'cocaleros' would benefit from the highway, which would allow them to gain easier access to markets. Yet 'comunarios' argue that it would create a structural incentive to extend coca-plantations into the park, forcing a massive exodus of the indigenous communities settled there.

conserve biodiversity, protect indigenous peoples living in voluntary isolation, and avoid the release of CO_2 emissions. It also envisioned the transition to a sustainable economy, using the funds raised to create jobs in economic sectors such as renewable energy, while at the same time respecting the region's natural and cultural biodiversity.

The origins of the initiative can be traced back to a longstanding struggle against oil extraction in the Amazon, with a prominent role of Ecuadorian public intellectual Alberto Acosta and of environmental NGOs – mainly *Acción Ecológica*, and, from its creation in 1996, the Oilwatch Network. With the establishment of this network, a proposal for enacting an Oil Moratorium in Yasuní was raised, covering both oil exploitation and exploration: the Oilwatch initiative "An Eco-Logical [sic] call for conservation, climate and rights", which was presented in 2005 at an experts' meeting held in Italy on conservation in protected areas.

A momentous debate in the Ecuadorian public sphere regarding oil extraction and sustainable development just before campaigning for presidential elections prompted to-become-president Correa to include the oil moratorium idea in his government plan in 2006, and was officially taken up by Alberto Acosta when he became Minister of Mines and Energy, under the label Yasuní-ITT Initiative. Along with Acosta, many prominent figures of environmental and indigenous rights groups joined the government, with mixed effects: on the one hand, it helped bring their issues onto the state agenda, but on the other, it weakened civil society.

From the foundational stone of the official Yasuní-ITT project to its later signing with an *ad hoc* UNDP Trust Fund, however, civil society actors, and particularly indigenous organizations, were sidelined from the process. The proposal was primarily discussed between the Ecuadorian state and international actors at the institutional level. The indigenous and environmental movements were only mentioned in the UNDP document as pledging their support to the proposal (Arsel & Avila Angel, 2012). Aspects of economic compensation and the instrumental value of Yasuní as a carbon-sink to mitigate climate change gradually took over the original, 'subversive' framing of Yasuní-ITT as a spearhead towards a post-carbon world. Voices began to raise denouncing a co-optation of the initiative by the government, under a business-as-usual logic. According to Acosta, the president has been a "reluctant environmentalist", at times raising objections to the scheme and at others slowing down momentum and crucial progress (Kozloff, 2011). Despite the lofty ambitions of the proposal, from the outset, the Correa government had refused to rule out extraction in the Yasuní Park (which

was known as "Plan B", but became official only in 2009), while simultaneously negotiating concessions to Chinese and Brazilian corporations to begin exploration. In fact, the build-up of massive infrastructure for oil exploitation in areas within the Yasuní National Park contiguous to the declared-as-intangible zone of the 'ITT' had already started as early 2007. In June 2008, the government requested the national oil company Petroecuador to issue a call for tender, in preparation for the hypothetical scenario of exploiting the ITT oil fields.

By 2009 the alleged inability of Yasuní-ITT to attract sufficient serious interest from the international community prompted the Ecuadorian government to put forward a revised proposal, changing both its concrete terms and the language of its appeal: The new proposal narrowed down its focus to global climate change, and offered tradable Yasuní Guarantee Certificates (CGY by its Spanish acronym) instead of the earlier request for direct cash transfers. This proposal attracted strong support from the German parliament, as well as serious interest from Spain, Italy, and other nations. After closely coming to a deal at the Copenhagen Climate Summit in 2009, Correa unexpectedly withdrew from negotiations in 2010, leading to the resignation of his Minister of Foreign Affairs, Fander Falconi. In the ensuing national debate, Correa progressively watered down his rhetoric on Yasuní, and announced giving serious consideration to start exploiting some of the oil fields in the ITT block with "minimal environmental impact", possible through allegedly sustainable technologies. (Arsel & Avila Angel, 2012)

Civil society sought to reclaim Yasuní-ITT: At the "People's Summit in Rio+20 for Social and Environmental Justice in Defense of the Commons and against the Commodification of Life" which took place in parallel to the official conference, civil society organizations, movements, and transnational advocacy networks working in Latin America bannered the Yasuní-ITT initiative against the "Green Economy", which was being promoted at official levels (cf. Chapter 3). Yet resistance counter-forces were insufficient: With Correa's legitimacy reassured with his victory at the presidential elections on February 2013 with 57% of electoral support, the fate of Yasuní proved to be sealed. In August 2013, the president officially announced his decision to drop the initiative and start exploiting oil in the ITT block, with the ex-post consent of the National Assembly, where his party *Alianza País* had the absolute majority. A constitutionally mandatory referendum on the issue was rejected by Ecuador's National Electoral Commission under accusations of civil society groups having manipulated signed petitions. Polls, however, showed that before its cancellation, the Yasuní-ITT

Initiative enjoyed very high levels of popular support (80% in favor of the initiative and more than 66% opposed to oil exploitation) (Arsel & Avila Angel, 2012).

The learning-effects of Yasuní-ITT did not stop at its official cancellation, however. Ecuadorian civil society groups have not given up on Yasuní, and launched post-cancellation resistance campaigns: the Network in Support of Yasuní RAYAS (*Red de Apoyo al Yasuní*) and *Amazonía por la vida* ('Amazon for life'), with its campaign *Yasuní depende de tí* ('Yasuní depends on you') are the most important groups of organizations supporting not only a re-enactment of the Yasuní-ITT Initiative but also fueling an international collective reflection towards a post-carbon civilization.

The Yasuní-ITT Initiative case constitutes a perfect metonymy for the trajectory of BV as a political discourse: Initially, the Initiative was crucial in Correa's discourse as a symbol of a new development model: "the star of the citizens' revolution", it was called. Progressively, however, it was watered down to accommodate prevailing policy-framings and made ever more contingent upon international compensation. To be sure, a series of contingent elements (e.g. the unexpected withdrawal of Correa from the post-Copenhagen negotiations, or the equally unexpected withdrawal of the support pledged to Yasuní-ITT by the German government, despite broad congressional approval[208]) played a role in preventing Yasuní-ITT from becoming a success-story; yet its very vulnerability to such factors illustrates the exogenous vulnerabilities of 'transformation projects' in the context of global capitalist entanglements. In spite of this, according to Acosta et al. (2009, p. 1), the Yasuní-ITT initiative marks a rupture in the history of global sustainability governance, and constitutes a prototypical measure to effectively mitigating the greenhouse effect causing climate change. Furthermore, it would showcase an alternative to the extractivist development model, and, at the same time, an option for globally co-building a good life, understood as a life in harmony among human beings in their cultural diversity, and between these and nature. At the same time, Yasuní-ITT dramatically exposes the structural cleavages between global and national, public and private interests[209], and state and civil society.

[208] While the German parliament mostly favored the support of Yasuní-ITT, since June 2008 Merkel's government did not, the main opposition coming from then Development Minister Dirk Niebel, of the liberal party FDP. Consequently, the case for Yasuní-ITT was also weakened in other potentially supportive countries.

[209] As also the Stern Report of 2006 on the economics of climate change convincingly showed, the relevant cleavage is not between economic and other forms of value, as it is often framed in the public

Synthesis: The discursive process of BV

Analogously to what we did for the GT debate in Chapter 4, this reconstruction of the history of the BV debate can be synthesized in a schematic time-line view of the discursive process. The same point of departure be set for a common timeframe for both case studies, a first incubatory phase can be outlined spanning between Rio 1992 and the turn of the century. In Latin-America, this SD-consensus phase was strongly marked by another consensus: the Washington-Consensus. Like with GT, the 'cultural mood' here ranged from a 'neoliberal euphoria' to a resignation in the face of post-cold war capitalist triumphalism, at the beginning, to catastrophic collapse in most Latin-American countries towards the end of the century. Unlike the case in Europe, however, social struggles continued to confront the all-powerful technocratic elites throughout this period, especially under the guise of peasant movements.

From 2000 to 2007, we identified the period of discursive emergence of BV ('primordial BV'), in a 'glocal' conjunction of international development elites and local indigenous intellectuals, drawing on traditional communitarian ways of life. These reflections were enriched through agonistic dialogues with a variety of thought-currents, including feminist, ecologist, alter-globalist, postdevelopmentalist, interculturalist, eco-Marxist, and Liberation-Theologist contributions. The 'cultural mood' is of contestation or creative tension, and the arenas of discourse-production range from local cultural and social struggles, national politics, and global civil society.

In the period between 2008-2009, alongside the constitutional assemblies in Ecuador and Bolivia, the discursive interaction is concentrated in the political arena. The consensus-oriented constitutional process prompted a political assemblage ('hybrid BV') of the various views and positions around BV.

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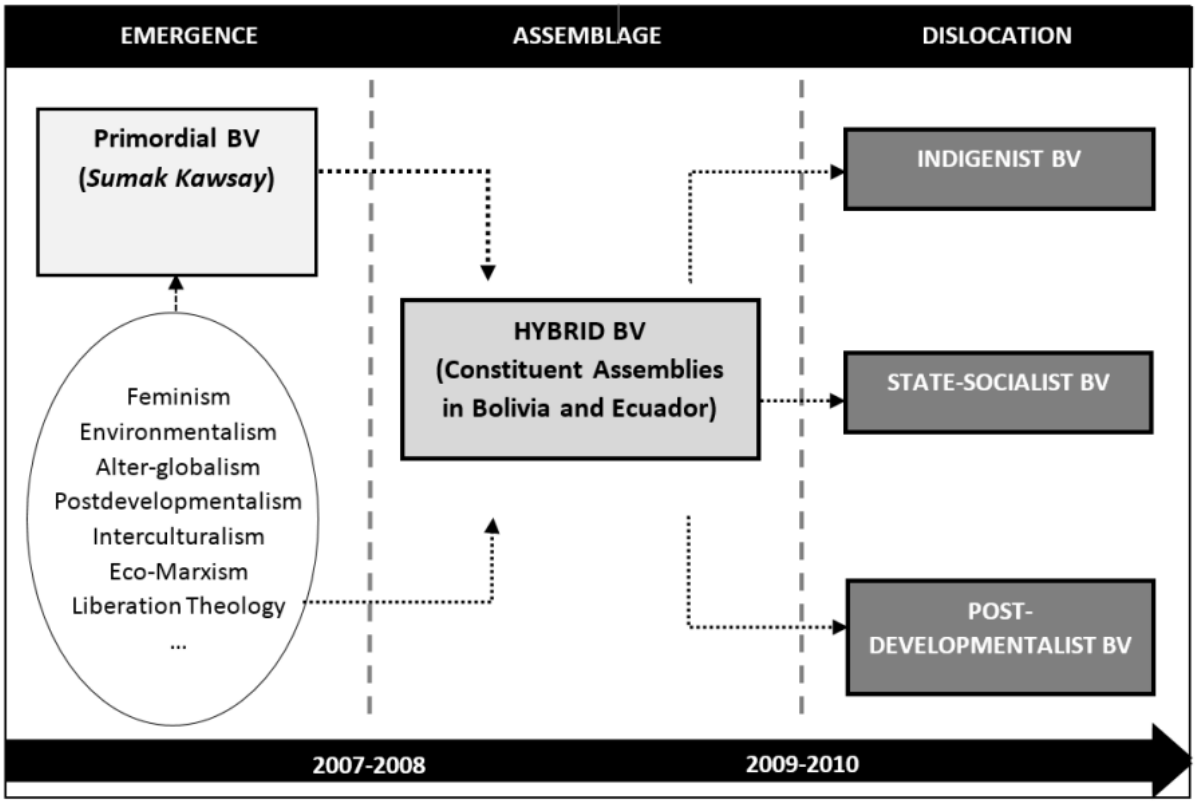
sphere, but rather between private and public interest. Indeed, even if attending to the economic dimension alone, the case for Yasuní-ITT could have been solidly defended: according to Earth Economics estimations, while the Yasuní-ITT initiative demanded contributions in amount US$3.6 billion over a time-span of 13 years in compensation for not exploiting oil reserves, the environmental benefits of the initiative were estimated at a net present value of US$ 9.89 billion, and the environmental costs of oil production in the ITT at US$ 1.25 billion. Furthermore, while Ecuador's high and increasing debt-servicing is indeed dependent on oil-export revenues, fossil-fuel-subsidies doubled between 2006 and 2012, from 1,35 billion to 2,86 billion dollars yearly (Alayza Moncloa & Gudynas, 2012). The proven reserves in the ITT amount to the worldwide consumption of oil of merely 4 days (Fontaine & Narváez, 2007).

The 'cultural mood' is one of empowerment, where representatively is delegated to the state as the main bearer of hope for deep transformations in society.

But the pragmatist drive of politics could not hold a forced consensus with fundamental underlying differences together, pitting territorial vs.de-territorialized views, reformist and transformative, urban vs. rural, and socio-economic vs. eco against each other. The struggle is conducted now in two parallel fronts: politics and culture. The cultural mood is antagonistic, with governments and their supporters clinging to their electoral legitimacy, and social movements going back to their conventional role of resistance, giving way to a discursive dislocation or trifurcation into three main strands: the *Indigenist BV*, the *State-Socialist BV*, and the *Postdevelopmentalist BV*, which will be analyzed in the next section with respect to their ideational contents. Figure 13 below visually synthesizes the above.

Figure 13: BV as a discursive process



Source: Cubillo-Guevara, A.P.; Vanhulst, J.; Hidalgo-Capitan, A., Beling, A.E. (2018)

5.4. *Buen vivir* as a field of discursive representation

Since a proper empirical discourse analysis will not be undertaken here, replaced instead with a reconstruction based on a literature review, a step-by-step analytical distinction of the SKAD-categories utilized in Chapter 3 for the GT debate is not possible. In its place, this section sets to offer an integral picture of the diverse BV-representations, retrieving and synthesizing existing categorization exercises. Due to their clearer link to discursive agents, as with the GT-representations, narratives will be used as the structuring category here, basing on the five basic strands of Figure 12. When possible, particular references or emphases on frames and phenomenal or problem-structures are specified insofar they add to a better understanding of the field of discourse under observation.

Primordial BV

In the broader crisis-context referred to above, the combination of epistemological and democratizing pressures has prompted both the scholarly and the political sphere to a process of exploration and experimentation with self-legitimizing and self-potentiating purposes. As part of this process, symbolic repertoires accumulated throughout history (and very much alive in the current praxis of diverse human collectives) were rediscovered as sources for the development of a new social and 'environmental rationality' (Leff, 2004a). Not surprisingly, the strong aborigine presence in the Andean and surrounding regions offered itself as a repository of traditional indigenous cosmogonies, which would serve both as a means of restoring the social recognition of indigenous population with their traditional cultural identities, on the one hand, and enabling the reconsideration of alternative epistemes which have been sidelined by Western-style modernity, on the other, enabling the emergence of new rationalities "at a middle-point between the dis-enchantment of the traditional world and the re-enchantment of the modern world, between science and metaphysics, between reason and spirituality" (Adrian E. Beling, Gomez Lechaptois, & Vanhulst, 2014, p. 160), as a source of cultural renovation towards the envisaged goal of a civilizational change (Estermann, 2012; Prada, 2014)

The traditional cosmogony of the Andean aborigines is holistic, i.e. it is defined by a relational conception of the world, which draws its unity from a mythical-symbolic super-structure. Other key principles of these cosmogonies include those of *"oppositional complementarity"*, whereby irresolvable

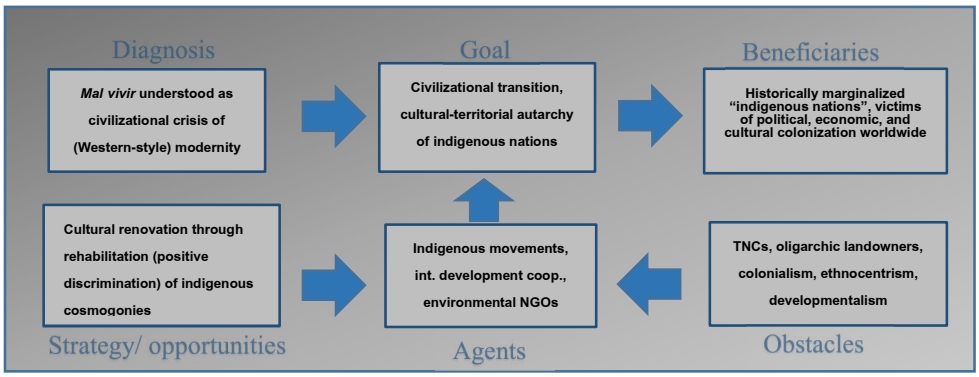
tension is understood as productive coexistence[210], *reciprocity*, *balance*, and a *circular (rather than linear) conception of time* (Estermann, 1998; Estermann & Instituto Superior Ecuménico Andino de Teología, 2006)[211]. The axial principle of relationality takes material shape in the *ayllu* – the communitarian subject of Andean aborigine traditions, the habitat of the Andean *runa* (individual subject). While resonating with the communitarian tradition of the West, the omni-inclusive ethos of the *ayllu* goes beyond Western communitarianism and comes arguably closer to a radical recognition of global systemic interdependencies, vulnerabilities, and the imperative for reciprocity, complementarity, and balance, hence arguably closer to the *Gaia* hypothesis (Lovelock, Margulis), inspired in Edgar Morin's and Fritjof Capra's complexity thinking, which sees the Earth – including organic matter, the air, the oceans and the planetary surface – like a complex system that can be considered like a single organism. It becomes clear why anthropocentric understandings of nature ('ecosystem services'), or linear understandings of the economic cycle (extractive production matrixes) or of history (progress, development), or the very idea of an 'environment' as separated from human societies (so-called 'nature/society divide') are not defined in the aborigine cosmogony of the Andes. Furthermore, the autonomous and independent individual of the modern episteme lacks entity in the Andean cosmogony: the subject is constituted as such, both individually and collectively, in the framework of a symbolic or mythical super-structure. The Andean *runa* seeks his or her mythical insertion in the world through ceremonial representation (Van Kessel & Larraín Barros, 2000). Hence the status of myths in the Andean cosmogony goes far beyond their role as a space of regulation of intersubjective discourse, as it is conceived of in the Habermasian tradition, to become a constitutive space of subjectivation, i.e a space for the discursive production of a certain form of subjectivity. (Adrian E. Beling et al., 2014, pp. 173–174; Estermann, 1998)

In the categories of Greimas, the primordial BV could be schematized as follows:

[210] This principle, in Kichwa language: *ch'exe*, broadly matches the principle of the included third of Edgar Morin's complexity logic, which challenges the principle of the excluded third (or principle of non-contradiction) of conventional logic, according to which A cannot be A and not-A at the same time. (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010a)

[211] For an in-depth comparative and articulative analysis of the Andean and the modern epistemes, see Beling et al. (2014)

Figure 14: Primordial BV



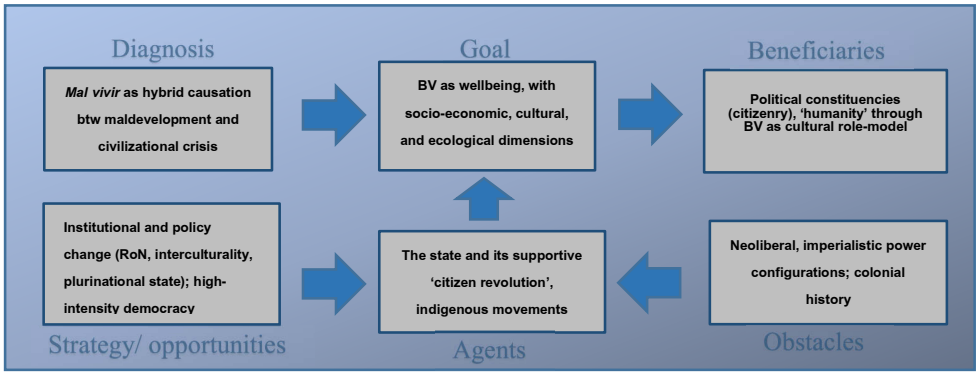
Hybrid BV

As any political consensus formula, this narrative strand somewhat lacks internal coherence, which becomes apparent in the trifurcation of the discourse after the consensual momentum of the constitutional process. Despite proclamations of BV as an 'alternative to development'[212], what can be actually observed in its political translations is that the relationship between the *Buen vivir* and development is rather of (largely unspecified) hybridation. The discursive construction we named 'primordial BV' comes under pressure to adapt to the symbolic frame of the broader (urban, bourgeois, and anti-neoliberal) 'citizen revolution' of Correa's party *Alianza Pais* – in Bolivia the so-called 'cultural democratic revolution' remained largely movement-based (Ramirez, 2010; Walsh, 2010) –, to the dominant discourses in international development cooperation, particularly the liberal Sen-Nussbaum-inspired 'Human Development' discourse of the UNDP (UNDP, 2010), and even to Western environmentalist discourses (Espinosa, 2015). The reductive and ambiguous equalization

[212] So, the National Plan for Buen Vivir of the Ecuadorian government states that *Buen vivir* is "a commitment to change […] that allows for the application of a new economic paradigm whose end does not focus on the material, mechanistic and seemingly endless accumulation of goods, but instead promotes an inclusive, sustainable and democratic economic strategy. […] Also, 'good living' is built […] on transition from current anthropocentrism towards biopluralism […]. Finally, 'good living' also builds on the demands for equality and social justice, and on the recognition, evaluation and dialogue of the peoples and their cultures, forms of knowledge and ways of life" (SENPLADES, 2009, p. 10). Even the updated plan in 2013 states that BV is "is not a new development paradigm, but a liberating social alternative that proposes other priorities for social organization, other than mere economic growth implicit in the development paradigm". In Bolivia, the 2009 enacted constitution states that "the Bolivian economic model is plural and aims to improve the quality of life and the 'well living' of all Bolivians" (art. 306).

between the concepts of BV and 'development' – which is a common feature of both the Ecuadorian and the Bolivian cases – amounts to neglecting inbuilt tensions between these two concepts (Vanhulst & Beling, 2014a), most critically: the biocentric character of BV requires overcoming the society/nature dualism that has become entrenched in Western-style modernity and, by implication, a fundamental redefinition of the dominant idea of development. However, the ambiguous experiment with the hybridation of BV produced noteworthy outcomes in terms of institutional and policy-innovation, which gained praise around the world, such as the institution of 'Rights of Nature' (RoN) – acknowledged in the Ecuadorian 2008 constitution and in Bolivia's Law of Rights of Mother Nature (2010) – the constitutional recognition of a plurinational state in Bolivia, or the acknowledgement of a "plural economy aimed at enabling the good life for all Bolivians" (art. 306). A policy innovation that captured worldwide attention was Yasuní-ITT (see Excursus above). Furthermore, the re-conceptualization of conventional political parties as 'party-movements' also became object of interest for scholarly and political analysts alike (Altmann, 2013a).

Figure 15: Hybrid BV

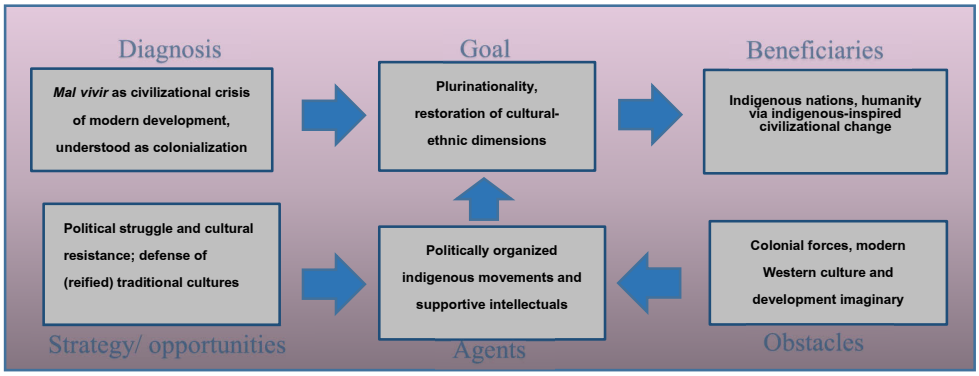


Indigenist BV

As reaction to the alleged Westernization or co-optation of BV as a consequence of its political appropriation, the indigenist conception of BV (the Spanish term 'buen vivir' usually neglected in favor of *sumak kawsay*) constitutes a form of symbolic-material resistance to the historical constant of 'subalternization' of traditional indigenous ways of life (Oviedo Freire, 2013), and is thus more focused on the recovery and affirmation of indigenous identity and political self-determination than on socio-economic or environmental goals (although these are also considered in the discourse of *sumak*

kawsay), and pursues the primary goal of plurinationalization of Latin-American states with a strong indigenous presence (Simbaña 2011, cited in Cubillo-Guevara et al., 2018). Cultural and particularly spiritual elements from aborigine traditions are also emphasized (in particular, the relationship to land and territory: the *Pachamama*) (Estermann & Instituto Superior Ecuménico Andino de Teología, 2006; Huanacuni, 2010). Advocates of indigenist versions of BV[213] are pejoratively referred to by politicians and intellectuals adhering to the statist current of BV as fanatic 'pachamamistas' (Houtart, 2011), as being "stuck in infantile indigenism" and being "incapable of implementing BV" (Correa, 2007). This indigenist variant of BV has been assimilated to concepts of *Etnodevelopment* (Masabalín, 2017) and hybridizes more or less explicitly with certain tenets of decolonial theories, in particular, from intellectuals of the Modernity-Coloniality Group (represented i.a. by Anibal Quijano, Walter Mignolo, Enrique Dussel, and Edgardo Lander). This strand of thought sees the vindication of indigenous peoples as largely incompatible with (the universalistic and colonial pretensions of Western-style) modernity and requiring the development of an "indigenous way" (Quijano, 2011; Viteri, 2002b). This stark opposition between indigeneity and modernity – both framed in an essentialist way – turns it into a rather particularistic strand (Vanhulst & Beling, 2014a), which contributes to explain the discursive dislocation in the post-consensual phase of the BV debate. On the other hand, indigenist activism contributed to a decisive shift from ethnic minorities (or otherwise marginalized groups) being framed as objects to being recognized as agents of identity politics and policy-making (CAOI, 2008)

Figure 16: Indigenist BV



[213] In this categorization, indigenist intellectuals are represented, among others, by Carlos Viteri, Simón Yampara, Grimaldo Rengifo, Mario Torrez, Javier Medina, Luis Macas, Nina Pacari, Luis Maldonado, Fernando Huanacuni, Javier Lajo, Raúl Prada, Floresmilo Simbaña, Atawallpa Oviedo, Xabier Albó, Rafael Bautista.

Statist-socialist BV

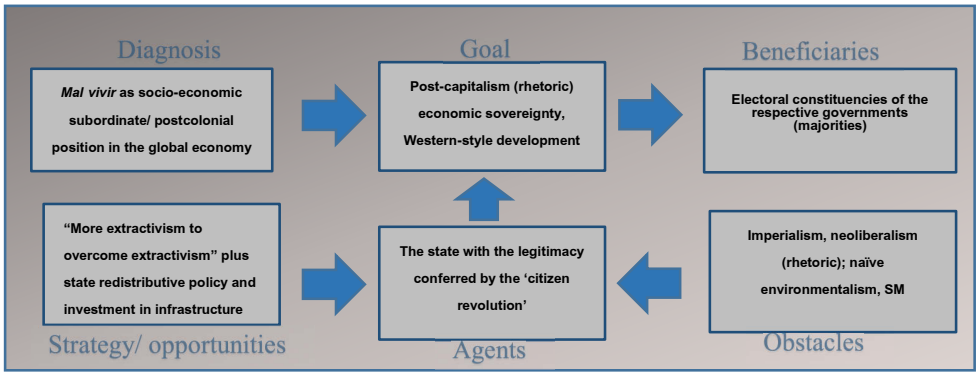
Results from the appropriation of BV by the formal political system and the government, claiming for itself the role of sole interpreter and guarantor of the "people's will", thus largely leaving behind its 'party-movement' profile. Representatives of this strand are include neo-Marxist Latin-American and European scholars, as well as intellectuals associated to the governments of Bolivia and Ecuador, Nicaragua and El Salvador[214]. Key here is the importance given to welfare state-provisions, leaving environmental, cultural, and identitary questions in the background. This variant of BV becomes virtually indistinguishable, in practice, from the discourses of other leftist Latin-American governments at the time, both of the so-called 'Bolivarian' type (Venezuela, Nicaragua, El Salvador) and the more classical social-democratic ones (Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay), and could be assimilated to a more classical notion of development in its neo-Marxist variant, or that of "productive transformation with equity" (Braña, Dominguez, & León, 2016), as becomes apparent in formulas such as "Buen vivir socialism" (SENPLADES, 2013), "Andean socialism", 'bio-republican socialism". (Ramirez, 2010; Walsh, 2010), or 'socialism of the 21st century". (Dieterich, 2002)

While their declared aim is resisting economic globalization and transforming the productive matrixes of their respective countries into post-capitalist economic systems ("not market economies, but economies with markets") (Houtart, 2011), with a prominent role of social and solidarity-based economic relations (Coraggio, 2007), this model initially sets on a reinforced (neo-)extractivist policy to endow the state with the necessary economic resources for the cash-transfer policies referred to above. This is criticized as perpetuating secular patterns of accumulation and the prevalent extractivist matrixes, triggering stark opposition from civil society groups and grassroots movements, as well as from critical intellectuals, who have referred to the statist variant of BV as "senile development" (Martínez-Alier, 2010), "capitalism of the 20th century" (as opposed to the "socialism of the 20th century" formula of Bolivarian governments) (Santos 2014), as "savage extractivism" (as opposed to a sensible or "reasonable extractivism") (Gudynas, 2011b), as a "false alternative to neoliberalism"

[214] Among others: Rafael Correa, Evo Morales, Daniel Ortega, Salvador Sánchez-Cerén, René Ramírez, Álvaro García-Linera, Rosario Murillo, Iosu Perales, Fander Falconí, François Houtart, Pedro Páez, Ricardo Patiño, Katu Arkonada, Atilio Borón, Marta Harnecker, José Luis Coraggio, Félix Cárdenas, Vicente Escandell, Mariano Féliz, Valter Pomar, María Nela Prada, etc.

(Svampa & Viale, 2014a), or as "depriving BV of most of the innovative character canonized in the 2008-2009 political constitutions" (Acosta, 2015b; Walsh, 2010).

Figure 17: Statist-socialist BV



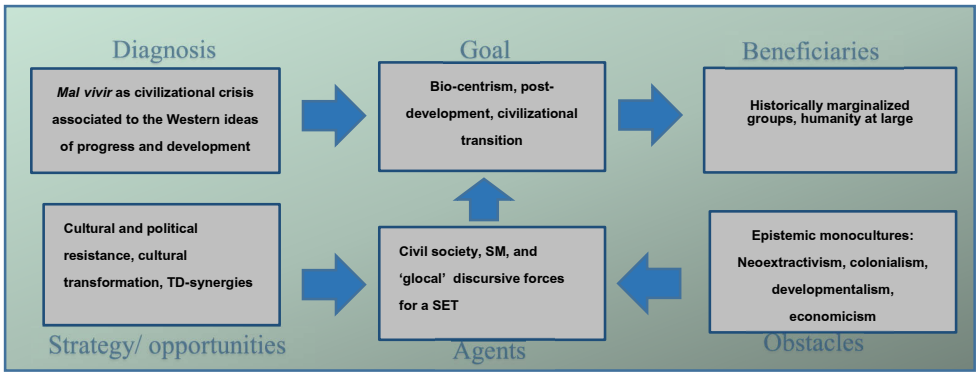
Postdevelopmentalist BV

Postdevelopmentalist BV discourses draw on the current of radical development critique[215], on environmentalist, and left-transformative currents (intellectual, social, and political), and to Latin-American social movements. Among its main representatives in the context of the BV debate are Alberto Acosta, Eduardo Gudynas, Arturo Escobar, Edgardo Lander, Miriam Lang, Leonardo Boff, Gustavo Esteva, Maristella Svampa, José María Tortosa, Koldo Unceta, to name but a few (Cubillo-Guevara et al., 2018). A main concern here is that the discussion around BV not be confined to the contingent realities of the Andean-Amazonian region (Acosta, 2010b). BV is thus framed as a discursive work-in-progress, directly linked to a process of intercultural dialogue around the fundamental question of ecological sustainability and other fundamental problems of (global) collective life (Bajoit, Pozo M, & Hernán, 2008); i.e. an inter-discursive dialogue with other (Western and non-Western) critical discourses dealing with the interface of social and ecological issues. The name 'postdevelopment' is self-explanatory in terms of the incompatibility claims between BV and modern development, the latter being framed as a pervasive form of symbolic-ideological domination (Acosta, 2015b). BV is thus framed, by contrast, as an "alternative to development", with great decolonizing and humanist-utopian potential. This includes steering Latin-American economies away from extractivist dependence (Gudynas, 2011b).

[215] Cf. Footnote 5 in the Introductory Chapter for background on development critique.

Central here is also a democratic-participatory, plural, and *'glocal'* definition of the precise meaning of BV or 'the good life', as a *collage* of indigenous, peasant, syndicalist, cooperativist, feminist, pacifist, ecologist, socialist, religious, decolonial influences, including 'strong' ecological sustainability as their *sine qua non* condition of possibility (Gudynas & Acosta, 2011b), so that territorially anchored manifestations of BV can coexist in a plural and interdependent world. Potentially fertile discursive affinities can be drawn with transformation discourses from around the world (Acosta, 2014; Adrian E. Beling et al., 2018; Brand, 2015; Escobar, 2015), such as other reinstated tradition-based discourses (e.g. *Eco-swaraj* in India or *Ubuntu* in many African countries)(Kakozi, 2015), Degrowth (cf. Chapter 3), the various global and local environmental discourses[216], as well as reformist policy-currents with ideational affinity-potentials, such as Human Development (Adrian E. Beling et al., 2018). The postdevelopmentalist version of BV accords high importance to the role of civil society, especially social movements, in the definition and implementation of BV, regardless of their representation in the formal political system, as these actors are structurally and historically sub-represented, and discriminated against by the prevalent developmentalist ideology. Postdevelopmentalist intellectuals are accused, from the state-socialist current, of lack of political pragmatism, of a certain nihilism, or of being "environmentalist romantics" (Correa, 2007), and, from the indigenist strand, as having perverted the original meaning of BV, filling it with Westernizing significations that are alien to the Andean cosmogony (Grosfoguel, 2016; Oviedo Freire, 2013)

Figure 18: Postdevelopmentalist BV



What can we learn from the discursive representations of BV?

[216] For a comprehensive list, see Martinez-Alier (2014)

The overall phenomenal or problem-structure in the GT debate comes out clearly from the above considerations, and can be synthesized in four categories: an ecological dimension, a socio-economic dimension, a cultural-traditional dimension, and a political dimension (Acosta, 2009; Belotti, 2014). These categories, as well as the political and cultural strategies and instruments deployed with each, are framed as rather harmonizable or as conflictual, depending on their narrative embeddedness in the above identified strands.

In terms of framing, what comes out most clearly from the literature on BV is its ambivalent relationship with both *development* – understood as a particular discourse and dominant ideology from which to emancipate, and as a holy grail, at the same time – and with *modernity*, which is often conflated with understandings of Euro-Atlantic diffusionism.

As we did with the GT, a triple question can be raised to classify the insights gained from the analysis of BV-representations: what *unites*, what *divides*, and what could be *bridged* among the diverse discursive strands?

The political consensus attained around the 'hybrid BV' represents the lowest common denominator of all strands, synthesizing their commonalities (or at least the limits of their respective cognitive elasticity and political compromise). A common denominator is, beyond any doubt, the rejection of neoliberalism, largely perceived as the root of the deep socio-economic and socio-environmental crisis of the final stretch of the past century. The generic idea of *Buen vivir* as an idea of good life with a native flavor, but also with various foreign influences (from the Aristotelian *eudaimonia* to the Human Development indicators of UNDP), a rather abstract concern for the ecological environment, or else the politization of power relations and their territorial dimension are other common features (Brand, 2015) among the diverse discursive currents that flow into the 'hybrid BV'. Here the four dimensions largely converge across the discursive spectrum; but the hybrid BV, as an expression of political consensus, remains largely rhetorical: BV as a harmonious vision of organic community-ecological relationships (with nature being attributed intrinsic value), adding up to a plural, post-capitalist economy at the country-level, with a frictionless integration of traditional indigenous and modern cultural matrixes into a plural collective plurinational identity.

The post-consensual trifurcation, in turn, expresses the key cleavages among the three discursive strands: the indigenist strand tends to privilege the identitary-traditional dimension over the other three, largely dismissive of their reciprocal local and global entanglements. Under the banner of decolonization, a reified essentialist view of indigenous cultures is typically played against (an equally reified view of) modernity. While the ecological dimension is implicit in the indigenous cosmogonies,

political (territorial) and cultural self-determination are envisioned as the royal road towards all these goals. The relationship towards the modern world is antagonistic. The socialist strand, in turn, under the (declared) premise of attending to the immediate and basic needs of the impoverished population (and assuming that the only way to do this is with a rent-capturing and -redistributing state), subordinates the ecological and identitary, as well as the political-democratic dimension, to the prior goal, whereby the relationship among these goals is framed as conflictual. Despite opposing colonial-like economic subordination to Western powers, the relation to (Western-style) modernity is aspirational. Lastly, the postdevelopmentalist strand sees all dimensions of BV as interdependent or organically interlinked. The various dimensions can thus not be played against each other without jeopardizing the whole emancipatory and transformative enterprise: The ecological dimension is central, since all other dimensions "derive cascading from it, as it forces into rethinking the economic system, the cultural parameters of reference, the patterns of social interaction, and the form of political organization" (Belotti, 2014, pp. 43–44). The alleged prioritization of socio-economic dimension by the statist-socialist version implies stepping into the 'commodity-trap' that perpetuates colonial structures of power by the agents of development; and the disregard of larger socio-economic and ecological dimensions at the planetary scale for the sake of the cultural-territorial dimension by the indigenist strand undermines the very conditions of possibility of their decolonizing ambitions. Western-style modernity is not rejected wholesale, but rather *provincialized* (Chakrabarty, 2000), that is, removed from the place of a (false) universal and understood as a particular spatiotemporal constellation. Cultural dialogue and creativity is thus prescribed as a means towards emancipation in a global interdependent constellation. "Cognitive justice" (Santos) is deemed a precondition for global social justice and ecological sustainability.

From the above, it becomes clear that the statist-socialist version of BV has largely forsaken culturally innovative and politically transformative aspirations towards a social-ecological transition, and rather taken a business-as-usual pathway towards conventional development. Rather than a post-capitalist, biocentric political project, as it is rhetorically proclaimed, the statist-socialist BV constitutes an attempt at humanizing capitalism and the liberal vision of society (with the corresponding centrality of ideas of 'freedom', 'autonomy', 'inclusion', etc.; as well as a dualist ontology). In terms of the discursive configuration of the BV field of debate, it can be seen as playing a similar role to that of the *Green Economy* discourse in the GT debate, taking part of discussions but not really defensible as a transformation discourse in and of itself, as conceptualized in the framework of this research (cf. Introductory chapter).

In the GT debate, we identified controversy-prone themes (the need for economic growth, the ideal of sufficiency as a political program, and the territorial re-embeddedness of economic relations), as well as disputed signifiers and understandings of an invariably positively connoted modernity, and discrepant assessment over technical matters (chiefly, the 'decupling hypothesis') (cf. Chapter 3). What key axes of conflict can be identified as traversing the BV debate?

- Anti-neoliberalism/ anti-imperialism versus post-developmentalism/ post-capitalism. This cleavage can be framed more broadly as one between those opposing *social injustices* (only) versus those opposing *social pathologies* (i.e. the way of life inspired by the 'developed' West and North).
- The stance towards nature and its relationship to society: The trifurcation of the BV discourse correspondingly yielded three different positions. Two of them match the ones we found in the GT debate: the statist-socialist BV adopts a stance of pragmatic realism, whereby ecological prudence and the 'Rights of Nature' become a function of the political and economic logic of the prevailing order. Postdevelopmentalists adopt an eco-realist stance, and indigenists a 'mystical' stance, whereby nature is ritualized. The two latter reject the Western modern view of a reified and commodified relationship towards nature (Cortez, 2010), as becomes apparent in anti-extractivist stances (oil-moratorium, Yasuní-ITT); postdevelopmentalists on the grounds of precaution and cultural plurality, and indigenists on metaphysical grounds (*Pachamama* or mother earth).
- De-colonialization is understood in diverse ways, which conflict with each other: a) in classical Dependentist theoretical categories as unequal terms of trade and a structurally disadvantaged international division of labor (in the rhetoric of the statist-socialist discourse), b) as unequal ecological exchange (Haberl et al., 2011; Hornborg, 1998), c) as epistemic colonization (Santos, 2009; Santos et al., 2007), or else d) as unequal domestic distribution of power and resources between indigenous nations and the *mestizo* Ecuadorian society or government as its identitary 'other'. While the first understanding is dominant in the statist-socialist discourse, ecological unequal exchange and "cognitive justice" are aspirations of postdevelopmentalists, and the power-struggle among local forces is exclusive to the indigenist discourse. These differences notwithstanding, the three discursive strands also draw on each other at convenience. (Vanhulst & Beling, 2014b)

- Stance towards modernity[217]: Again here, a universalist understanding of modernity (as having constitutive laws and principles set *a priori*) implicit in the statist-socialist BV clashes against a pluralist understanding of postdevelopmentalists, who, from their perspective of (interdependent) cultural plurality, oppose monolithic understandings of modernity, which they rather see as multiple, entangled, and embedded; and especially against a particularistic understanding of both modernity and indigeneity by the indigenist strand, which places itself in a position of (antagonist) alterity towards modernity, understood in a reified way as Eurocentric.
- Plurinationality vs. interculturality: cultural diversity itself is understood in different ways in each discursive strand, particularly in Ecuador, which features greater ethnic and cultural diversity among the population, as compared to Bolivia: Advocates of plurinationality constitute a dominant minority in Ecuador (i.e. politically well represented indigenous groups), who fight for their collective right to identity as indigenous nations and for their self-determination, while interculturality is advocated by marginal minorities (especially afro-descendants), who do not constitute a *demos* themselves, and therefore demand more recognition of individual cultural rights. Both contrast with liberal multiculturalism, however, in that plurinationality and interculturality seek mutual engagement among distinct *epistemes*, while multiculturalism is more impregnated with postmodernist mutual indifference.
- Territoriality versus de-localization: the strongest territorial focus is found in the indigenist strand, and was constitutive of the primordial discourses on BV, as well. These territorial claims have political (plurinationality, self-determination), cultural, and ecological dimensions (*Pachamama*), and can be framed as part of a broader "eco-territorial turn" in the early 21st century Latin-America (Svampa, 2012). Insofar state-centered, the socialist BV retains a territorial focus as well, though in a conflictive stance vis-à-vis the claims of indigenous organizations. The postdevelopmentalist strand, in turn, is less centered on territorial claims and more cosmopolitan in scope. While still attributing central importance to spatiotemporal embeddedness, it conceives of territory as defined within a global constellation of structures and flows of power.

Our third category of analysis, the bridging opportunities and practices in the BV debate, are analyzed in the following section on BV as a discursive performance.

[217] This line of argumentation is developed in greater detail in Vanhulst & Beling (2014b)

5.5. Dramaturgical Analysis of the BV debate

This analysis of the BV debate as a discursive staging or performance parallels the analogous analysis done for the GT debate in Chapter 4, which, drawing on the insights gained from the context and diachronic analysis of Section 5.3, on the one hand, and on the analysis of BV-representations of Section 5.4, on the other, distinguishes among the same dimensions considered in the case of GT: 1) the matching of (foreground) discourse and cultural (background) representations; 2) the matching of the discourse with the contingent spatiotemporal and situational context of instantiation; 3) the enabling and constraining role of social powers of symbolic production, distribution, and interpretation; 4) the credibility/ legitimacy of the discourse performance (i.e. matching of the discourse with the performing actor); and 5) the reception by the discourse addressees (i.e. the matching between discourse and its various audiences). As in Chapter 4, each dimension's analysis is summarized in a table stating the main structural-practical *enablers* of transformative learning, discriminating between those breaking the prevailing (failed) SD consensus ('disruptors'), and those fostering the emergence of the new ('generators'). To finalize, relevant *practices* and *roles* of agents in the BV debate will be distilled, towards their systematization and typification in comparative perspective with GT in Chapter 6.

Articulation discourse-culture

In Latin-America, but especially in those territories with strong indigenous presence, there exists a historically cemented *identitary-cultural alterity* vis-à-vis the modern civilizational model of the West. Indeed this has historical roots: While in the West, as an outcome of the process of modernization in the 19th century, a modern and rationalized culture and political system became hegemonic vis-à-vis their non-modern predecessors, in Latin America modernization led to a long-term duality between different cultural patterns, giving place to a hybrid cultural matrix[218] (Avritzer, 2002). This alterity is thus an ambiguous one: on the one hand, it is antagonistic, as results from centuries of (post)colonial, subaltern insertion into the world. This has made the political problematization of power relations a *Leitmotiv* in the history of social and political movements in the region (Larraín, 2005). On the other

[218] This hybridation, as well as its entanglements between difference, inequality, and (dis)connection between 'worlds' has been theorized mainly by Nestor García Canclini (2004)

hand, this alterity is aspirational, an unfulfilled promise that keeps slipping out of reach. In scholarly and public discourse, this struggle between modernizing forces and resistance has often been framed as a struggle between the 'enlightened elites' and the 'backward masses' (Avritzer, 2002).

The BV debate showcases the attempt at articulation of these hitherto considered antagonistic trends (Carballo, 2015b): the discredited development paradigm, confronted with accusations of linearity, individualism, anthropocentrism, expansionism, instrumentalization and commodification of nature, etc., was exposed to ideas of circularity, relationality, biocentrism, holism, and an "environmental rationality" (Leff, 2004b). The development sector offered the structural-institutional scaffolding, while the indigenous cultural heritage offered a contrast surface against which a process of self-reflection and self-questioning of the West unfolded. While the post-constitutional phase saw a diffraction of the BV discourse as a result of this veritable "clash of civilizations", cultural imaginaries were (and are still being) intensively re-created and transformed in the process.
This process of cultural or epistemic dialogue was also shaped locally through the increasing politization of the BV debate and the re-balancing of political forces, as critique of neoliberalism and civilizational critique came under the same banner. Although the broader public largely relates to the Western imaginary of development in aspirational terms, a sub-public sphere with high leverage – the indigenous forces and their discursive allies – upheld a different narrative tapping into an alternative (indigenous) background sub-culture.

Table 13: BV Articulation discourse-culture

Disruptors ('unbuilding unsustainability')	**Generators ('building sustainability')**
• Critique of modernity/ development docks with historically established power-critical sub-culture (esp. in subaltern population groups: indigenous, peasants, etc.; and their social movements) • Large sub-culture in relationship of alterity to the modern West offering 'resistance' to historical colonial relations (also cultural)	• Non-Western episteme offering a contrast-surface for societal self-reflection • Pro-modernization discursive forces (development sector) opening up to dialogue with hitherto antagonized indigenous cosmogonies • Merger of anti-neoliberalism and civilizational critique under the same political banner (BV) create discursive room for inter-epistemic dialogue.

Articulation discourse-contingent situation

Beyond the overall contextual markers outlined in section 5.2, the successful fusion of the BV performance(s) can be associated with the respective particular junctures of the three broad phases of the BV debate identified in this chapter: emergence, assemblage or hybridation (political consensus), and trifurcation or dislocation (post-consensus). Furthermore, we identified a basic agential configuration (made of indigenous and social movements, intellectuals, and the state) and two types of bidirectional flows: bottom-up and top-down, on the one hand, and inside-outward / outside-inward (between the territorial base and the global sphere), on the other. These categories are combined here to understand the successful fusion of the BV discourse.

Phase 1: Emergence. "glocal" ' discursive articulation

The emergence of BV takes place in the context of a global political contestation over the prevailing development model, with the international development cooperation seeking to establish links of territorial legitimacy by docking to longstanding local struggles *(outside-inward)*. It is thus no coincidence that the first explicit formulations and systematization attempts of BV (*sumak kawsay* and *suma qamaña*) emerged in this context, with both international and local agents under pressure to provide some answer to the social-economic and ecological crisis that was accelerated through the global spread of neoliberal policy-views over the two prior decades. This constitutive 'glocal' entanglement also serves to explain why BV became entrenched, among other Western discourses, with the Human Development perspective so fashionable in the international bureaucratic sphere, which harnessed the Ecuadorian and Bolivian political experiments as an opportunity to further develop this framework. (Bretón et al., 2014)

At the local level, foreground-factors coming into play are mainly two: a) the anti-neoliberal consensus generating a critical social mood (reinforcing the antagonistic stance vis-à-vis the Western 'other') and generating pressures towards pluralization, as manifest in the Ecuadorian 'citizen revolution' and in the Bolivian 'cultural democratic revolution' (*inside-outward* flows), or, more violently, in the so-called Bolivian 'water war' (Olivera & Lewis, 2004); and b) the recalibration of the weight and discursive focus of the EIM towards the national instead of the local sphere, especially in Ecuador. Indeed, the participation of indigenous organization in the political campaign and (though briefly) in the government of president Lucio Gutierrez in 2002-2003 shifted the weight of the EIM towards Quito,

which meant that the movement's emphasis was placed on macro-conceptions of social reorganization at the national level, subordinating local and territorial aspects, as the 2001 revision of the political project of CONAIE illustrates. This explains the mainstreaming of political concepts such as plurinationality or indigenous nations (Altmann, 2013a, 2015a).

Phase 2: Macro-scale, state-led transformation project away from neoliberalism

This phase of consensual discursive construction is marked by the ambivalent role of state: indeed, on the one hand, the ownership-taking by the state brought BV to scale and led the debate to acquiring public status. At the same time, emblematic institutional and policy-designs (plurinational state, Yasuní-ITT, RoN) tap into the most avant-garde cultural imaginary of the West, awarding small, peripheral countries such as Ecuador and Bolivia international prestige – as attested, among others, by the influence of BV in the German GT debate (cf. Chapter 3). On the other hand, however, it subjected BV to the logic of the political system, creating a 'floating signifier' which eventually led to a discursive dislocation and to a watering down of the transformative character of BV as a political project, and back to (deepened) extractivism and economic dependence on primary-exports, market-driven environmentalism, exclusion of social movements from the sphere of politics, and consumer-oriented economic development.

Phase 3: Discursive dislocation and cultural and political (ant)agonism

The fragile consensus among clashing views and interests achieved at the constitutional assembly soon cracked as a result of its own internal tensions. The ensuing discursive dislocation led to an open confrontation and power struggle between government, on one side, and the 'infantile' indigenists and 'utopian' postdevelopmentalists, on the other; or else between the 'authentic' indigenists and the 'Westernizing' postdevelopmentalists. Yet despite exclusions, marginalization, de-legitimations, the discursive forces in dispute have a – in terms of collective learning – this trifurcation amounts to an interruption of the formerly unchallenged symbolic order (neoliberal, capitalist, developmentalist, modernist, or whatever universalist logic is foregrounded by the diverse actors), to be replaced by a situation of *de facto* cultural and political agonism, as the trifurcated strands maintain their relative autonomy and strength. The pathos of the debate has turned increasingly destructive, however, and thus antagonistic, with lasting transformative learning effects imperiled by the reaffirmation of governmental power from 2015-onwards in an increasingly adverse regional context often

characterized as the "end of the progressive cycle" in Latin-America. (Schavelzon, 2016; Svampa, 2016)

Table 14: BV Articulation discourse-contingent situation

Disruptors ('unbuilding unsustainability')	Generators ('building sustainability')
• outside-inward contestation of development as a result of persistent or aggravating socio-economic and ecological crises • global discursive forces seeking legitimacy through docking with territorially anchored traditions and emancipatory struggles • inside-outward, anti-neoliberal social mood reinforcing antagonistic stance towards the West and pressures towards cultural pluralization (citizen revolution, democratic cultural revolution)	• 'glocal' discursive entanglement for innovative cross-fertilizations • local mainstreaming of macro-focus in indigenous movement • State bringing BV to scale and lending it public status • International prestige through institutional and policy innovations (RoN, plurinational state, Yasuní-ITT) • Discursive dislocation into relatively balanced discursive forces, leading to cultural and political agonism

Articulation discourse-social powers

In the build-up of the BV debate, the power of discursive production, distribution, and interpretation is distributed between two basic institutional infrastructure-systems: the indigenous movement, on the one hand, and the state, on the other (with their respectively associated communication devices). The intellectual sphere and the outside-inward flows from the global sphere also play a central role in discursive production, circulation, and interpretation. Yet the two latter hardly shed any light on the power structures that mediate those processes on the ground, and are thus largely irrelevant to this step of analysis (except for the impact of foreign funding on the local structure of the EIM, as shown below). The peculiar characteristics of the indigenous movement (we focus here on the Ecuadorian case, as mentioned, because it is the most influential politically and thus discursively at national and regional level) makes it worthwhile analyzing in some detail, as it appears critical to understanding the fusion of the BV performance from a material-structural perspective.

The EIM is not a unified movement, but rather one made up of a plurality of politically and discursively heterogeneous organizations, which alternatively cooperate with or compete against each other, articulated in a bottom-up yet hierarchical organization fluidly connecting grassroots structures

or first-tier organizations (which affiliate virtually all indigenous people living in communities) with autarchic second- and third-tier organizations, latter at the national and even regional levels. This gives them a great capacity for mobilization. The selective disconnection between the diverse tiers provides also the autonomy required for discursive innovation, yet negotiation, contestation, and cooperation make sure the discourse remains coherent and articulable.

Within the movement, national (third-tier) organizations are the most visible ones, most of them networked in confederations (CONAIE, FEINE, and FENOCIN being the main organizations active at national level), representing the indigenous view in the formal political system at the national-state level. But first-tier organizations command the loyalty of their membership, as they provide for the local needs. Second-tier organizations, however, retain their share of power as recipients of the bulk of international development aid.

This fluid yet pyramidal structure of the EIM has fulfilled a number of functions in terms of political and discursive innovation:

- *Internal political balance:* At the local level, the heterogeneity of the social basis of the EIM meant diverse organizations historically emerging to cater for their diverse social, economic, and cultural needs, as well as political demands. Furthermore, the lack of control of national organizations over their grassroots membership historically kept third-tier organizations alternating in their hegemonic position within the movement, maintaining a structural heterogeneity that favors discursive innovation, and contributing to its resilience and increasing influence. The growing centralist focus of CONAIE in the 2000s prompted pressure from member organizations towards restoring internal balance to the structure through the empowerment of other national-level organizations, leading to a historically unique post-hegemonic situation (Altmann, 2013a)
- *Political leverage*: If constitutive heterogeneity constitutes the adequate breeding ground for discursive innovation, the organic hierarchical institutional design structurally supports discourse articulation (both within the movement and outwards). Furthermore, this broad yet organic network structure increased the political leverage of the EIM at the macro-level, both through its influence on the State as a pressure group and through directly controlling institutional structures and resources, e.g. the indigenous-controlled state-development agency CODENPE, or, in the academic sphere, through own intellectual production and an own indigenous university. Indigenous movements represent a minority group within the

population (estimates vary between 7-40% according to variable definitions of 'indigenity' and the political interests of those who did the counting). Yet the ties holding the social support-base of the movement together, in practice, are material (access to resources) rather than ethnic, since only a fraction of base-level organizations are purely indigenous (ca. 35%)[219]. From a materialistic vantage point, it can be argued that this peculiar organizational structure and identity boundary-construction largely works as a shield against social-conformity pressures and against resource access-constraints. It may also largely explain why the EIM has gained over-proportional political significance, with regard to the ethnic aspect (Becker, 2011).

- *Organizational resilience (material self-reproduction)*: The singular pyramidal structure of the EIM gives it a particularly resilient character: the material sustainability of the movement is largely decoupled from social humor, fad & fashion – but also from that of its own members! As basic form of collective organization, first-level or base organizations enjoy virtually guaranteed support by their members, and care for their particular daily needs through locally rooted interventions. Representative politics is diffracted and counter-balanced in every level: as beneficiaries of the lion's share of development aid, second-level organizations have financial independence. Furthermore, membership within national or regional federations is a matter of lower-level organizations, not individuals, which adds to stability. In addition, given that society at large (in particular elite groups, and excluding allied organizations such as TUs and communal associations) is the antagonistic 'other' of indigenous groups, pressures to conform to public opinion drastically drops. (Altmann, 2013a, p. 15).
- *Democratic safeguard*: From a more macro-political perspective, the three-tier structure of the EIM compensates (internally) for two of the historically sedimented structural barriers to a democratic politics in Latin-America (Avritzer, 2002): first, it fills-in the gap of institutional structures mediating between the state and individuals in the *metizo*-society; and, secondly, it loosens the rigid hierarchical separation between political and economic elites and the popular cultural and social arrangements of the masses.

[219] According to studies conducted by *Proyecto de Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas y Negros* (PRODEPINE) in 1998 and 2002 (Martínez Valle, 2006, p. 113, cited in Altmann, 2013a, p. 15)

The second power-infrastructure of discursive production, distribution, and interpretation mentioned above is that of the State: In Ecuador, the government plan 2007-2011[220] of the ruling party *Alianza País* had already adopted BV as a programmatic reference point for their government. A key mechanism of discursive cross-pollination here was the transfer of representative power – as well as of key personalities ('insider-outsider networks', cf. Chapter 4) and functions – from the EIM to the state. This decisively flattened the path towards the inclusion of BV into the 2008 constitution. (Altmann, 2013b)

Through its adoption by the state, BV is placed in the public sphere as a structuring political concept. This spotlighting of BV by the state potentiated interest in the topic by the national and international civil society, scholarly, and policy-spheres, thus amplifying the scope of the debate. Furthermore, the state played a key hermeneutic role in abstracting BV from its original indigenous definition-framework towards a discourse relevant for society at large, also enabling its international dissemination. This is illustrated by the ideas of a "biocentric turn" in Ecuadorian politics or a novel "bio-socialist republicanism", or the widely acclaimed idea of BV as a "new development paradigm for Latin America" (Ramirez, 2010).

Table 15: BV Articulation discourse-social powers

Disruptors ('unbuilding unsustainability')	**Generators ('building sustainability')**
• Polyarchic character of the BV debate + bidirectional 'glocal' flows • EIM as a strong political and discursive force in identitary relation of alterity vis-à-vis Westernized 'mestizo' society • Separation of material & political power within EIM (3-tier structure), creating conditions for discursive agonism. • Democratizing effect of the EIM through creating intermediate institutional infrastructure and breaking	• Production power: Three-tier structure of the EIM potentiating capacity for mobilization, discursive innovation, material self-reproduction, macro-political influence. Spotlighting by the state potentiating/ magnifying debate on BV. • Interpretive power: State re-framing BV into a whole-societal alternative-development or transformative approach • Distribution power: State bringing BV to scale and disseminating internationally.

[220] The original version of this government plan does not actually feature the expression *"sumak kawsay"* or *"buen vivir"*, but their contents are explicitly formulated in the three defining aspects of what we named the 'hybrid BV': "harmonious coexistence with nature", 'pluriculturalism' as an asset, and a 'sustainable' development model as an alternative to the capitalist system (Cortez, 2011)

rigid hierarchical divisions between elites and the masses.	

Articulation discourse-actors

To understand the fusion between the BV performances and the performing actors, a distinction becomes again necessary between the three diachronic phases of the BV debate. While in the case of the GT debate the perceived *feasibility* of a given narrative was a substantial factor in the credibility awarded to the respective discursive agents, in the BV debate the credibility of the performers depends more on linking BV to sources of broad *public or cultural legitimacy*, with feasibility hardly ever being discussed – rather, (un)feasibility is used as a disqualifying argument mainly by the government against indigenous movements and intellectual advocates of BV in the post-consensual phase of the debate. (Correa, 2007; Kozloff, 2011)

Phase 1: Emergence. 'glocal' discursive articulation

In the early phase of local anti-neoliberal resistance articulated with *outside-inward* development critique, the credibility of the BV discourse resided in the mutual legitimation between the international sphere (invoking the potentially global relevance of BV as a source of renewal of the development imaginary,) on the one hand, and long-standing local, grassroots' struggles seeking external support to gather momentum. The result is a situation of discursive creativity and cross-legitimation between global and local.

In its original elaborations, BV also drew on already legitimized, akin political discourses, in particular, on the discourse of 'development with identity'[221] (Cortez, 2010)

Phase 2: Macro-scale, state-led transformation project away from neoliberalism

In this phase, the state takes over as the main source of social legitimacy. As we saw, the legitimacy-transfer unfolded initially through the re-location of civil society leaders to the state and party-structures of the ruling parties *Alianza-País* (Ecuador) and MAS (Bolivia), and through the introduction

[221] 'Development with identity' is an approach which was already familiar at the regional level in policy-spheres, after being adopted by the so-called 'Indigenous Fund' (Fund for the Development of the Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean).

of BV into the sphere of development policy (first with the strategic plan of CODENPE and later with the government program of *Alianza-Pais*). But the key legitimacy-source were the constitutional processes (Cortez, 2010, p. 15) in both countries. Despite the growing importance of other governance agents, such as NGOs, the sovereign state remains unmatched in the legitimacy bestowed upon it domestically and internationally; indeed: whatever material translations of the abstract idea of BV may be conceived of, their actual implementation will be dependent on the willingness and ability of the state to not only "create" them, but also to back them up.

> No other agent – be they corporations, international organizations, or domestic civil society actors – can, at least for the time being, fulfill the same role […] no other public or private body is capable of matching the state's unique capability to create and enforce a constitution. (Arsel & Avila Angel, 2012, p. 221)

Moreover, in dramaturgical terms, the shift in the state's conventional role from "merely making environmental policy to taking on the preservation of nature as a whole" creates an unexpected twist in the familiar narrative samples (with their fixed role-allocations) that reinforces the perception of the importance or legitimacy of the issue. The fact that an oil-dependent country like Ecuador would assume a commitment like 'leaving the oil in the ground', as Yasuní-ITT aimed at, can only potentiate this perception (Arsel & Avila Angel, 2012, p. 221)

A last legitimacy-recourse identified from the literature is the articulation of the BV-utopia with mainstream (Western) political discourses, in coherence with the *'glocal'* character of the primordial BV-formulation. The strongest articulation was established with the aforementioned Human Development discourse of the United Nations (SENPLADES, 2009, pp. 18–19). But also the epistemic link to Aristotle's *eudaimonia* as the canonic Western reference for a political philosophy around the 'good life' was probably required to endow BV with public legitimacy in the *mestizo*-society (Bretón et al., 2014, p. 16).

Phase 3: Discursive dislocation and cultural and political agonism

The constitutional process, driven by the rationality of the political system, had the effect of producing an arguably premature, forced consensus of divergent worldviews and policy perspectives: the *authenticity* of the BV discourse(s) was perceived as being threatened. As we saw, this resulted in a break-up between the (self-proclaimed) 'wardens of BV' (indigenous and other grassroots movements, on the one hand, and environmental NGOs and postdevelopmentalist intellectuals, on the other) and

the state. Each of the dislocated discourses claims for itself a different form of legitimacy: the indigenist version reclaims the authenticity of the 'original BV' as rooted in indigenous cosmogonies[222]; the statist-socialist version claims the legitimacy of electorally backed representation, and the postdevelopmentalists assert the relevance of BV for a global social-ecological transformation. According to Arturo Escobar (2011), authenticity demands plurality and difference, but interdependence and vulnerability require recognition and coordination. The BV debate remains, therefore, a work-in-progress and in search for legitimacy, but certainly does offer a powerful platform for the agonistic construction of social-ecological utopias beyond the epistemic closure of conventional development approaches rooted in narrow definitions of modernity. (Vanhulst & Beling, 2014b)

Table 16: BV Articulation discourse- performing actors

Disruptors ('unbuilding unsustainability')	**Generators ('building sustainability')**
• Creative and mutually legitimizing dialectic between local and global against the status quo (neoliberalism, classical development discourse) • Cross-pollination with a range of heterogeneous critical discourses (environmental, development-critical, religious, feminist, eco-socialist, etc.) • BV as platform for the agonistic construction of social-ecological utopias beyond 'development' and Eurocentric modernity	• Legitimacy transfer from related, more established discourses with public legitimacy (Development with Identity, Human Development) • State endows BV with constitutional and institutional legitimacy, as well as with programmatic content. • Change in conventional role of the state from making environmental policy to taking up the protection of nature as a whole

Articulation discourse-audience(s)

[222] As we have seen, BV or *sumak kawsay* as such did not exist, as a cultural concept or an organic practice, in the traditional cosmogonies of the Andean and Amazonian indigenous peoples, but was rather a "postmodern invention of Aymara intellectuals of the 21st century (who are still indigenous)" (Uzeda Vásquez, 2009, p. 20), certainly building on indigenous cosmogonies and lifeworlds. This does not deprive what we have called 'primordial BV' of legitimacy, however; rather, it can be regarded as the product of a "cultural recreation or innovation", that is, as "the manifestation of a living culture". (Altmann, 2013b, p. 290)

The discursive diffraction or dislocation observed in the discourse around BV can be dramaturgically read, from an audience-perspective, as the result of dissimilar audiences entering the arena and co-producing discursive variations. Given the successful mainstreaming of BV into the political and cultural debate in Ecuador and Bolivia, uninvolved audiences (e.g. political opposition parties, conservative social milieus, global public sphere) can be held to have played a marginal role in the performative fusion of BV, and are thus given equally marginal consideration here.

As we saw, the common roof of the anti-neoliberal political consensus hosts diverse audiences with variable degrees of affinity in their respective discursive structures, ranging from anti-neoliberal or anti-imperialist neo-Keynesians (the state and its 'citizen constituency' – bourgeoise, liberal or working-class sector, including unionized indigenous and peasants, such as the *cocaleros* in Bolivia) to wholesale (dialogical or dismissive) critics of development and Euro-Atlantic modernity (social movements and intellectuals). International actors with local presence constitute yet another audience with a stake in the BV debate, exerting influence in both ideational and material terms (development cooperation, environmental organizations, and transboundary social movements, especially the alter-globalist movement). Unlike the weaker bond built around comparatively abstract 'discursive affinities' around the idea of a 'Great Transformation' in Germany, the alignment of all the above mentioned agents behind the banner of political party-movements – *Alianza País* in Ecuador and Movement towards Socialism (*MAS*) in Bolivia – had an actual political impact. This produced the clearest and most visible instance of fusion in the BV debate. We also learned, however, that such fusion was short-lived and soon broke apart. The most interesting question, from a perspective of transformative collective learning processes, is what sustains (or 'fuses') the agonistic discursive dialectic among the trifurcated BV in the post-consensus phase.

These diverse audiences offer, of course, distinct docking points to harness for dramaturgical fusion, including shared frames or storylines (see closing point of Section 5.4 for a systematic analysis of ideational cleavages), convergent interests and political demands, or common enemies. The aspirational bourgeoise and the proletarian 'citizen constituency', for example, demand 'inclusion' (understood as a larger share in the dominant socio-economic order). They require recognizable policy-concepts and indicators drawn from the conventional 'development imaginary'. They criticize 'romanticized' views of BV upheld by 'out-of-touch-with-reality' indigenous traditionalists and utopian intellectuals. In turn, politically organized indigenous sectors (representing subsistence-peasants, *ayllu*-dwellers) and indigenist scholars demand ethnic-centered identity-politics plus territorial autarchy, including political self-determination and economic pluralism – demands

eventually condensing in the political concept of plurinationality. They criticize 'Westernized conceptions' of BV by Europhilic intellectuals and its discursive cooptation by the state. The ethnic-centered project of plurinationality is regarded with distrust, however, by sub-represented minorities, mainly afro-descendants, who would otherwise, however, ally with the indigenous against their common 'other' (the *mestizo* society), largely backed by decolonial intellectuals. For their part, international agents praise, on the one hand, the epistemically and institutionally innovative character of BV (plurinational state, rights of nature, good life as policy-orientation), but demand, on the other, system-compatible indicators and forms of measurement for assessing the progress achieved in BV-policies (Belotti, 2014; Cortez, 2010), thus constraining that very innovation-potential. Postdevelopmentalist intellectuals and movements focus on the environmental dimension as cornerstone or organizing principle for a rearrangement of social systems towards a social-ecological transformation, criticizing both the 'retreat into the fortress' of an essentialized indigeneity and the neo-Keynesian statist-socialist discourse watering-down the transformative potential of BV. Finally, the statist BV also faces critiques from the political opposition, both on the right of the ideological spectrum – who deem BV anachronic, delusional, utopian, a form of evolutive backlash, or a lever of leftist extremism – and on the left, for whom BV is either not radical enough, not tackling the systemic-root causes of poverty and exclusion (traditional Marxist-Leninist left), or downplaying the ethnic-cultural element (anticolonial left). (Belotti, 2014; Cortez, 2011)

What bridging strategies can be observed at action to fuse these distinct audiences with their partly incompatible or competing demands?

The first is, as with the concept of 'Great Transformation', the ambivalence of BV as a 'floating signifier'. Indeed, BV oscillates between an 'alternative to development' and a 'new mode of development', or even a 'more successful old-style development', never mind that the BV-rhetoric[223], in all of the discursive variants, remains system-subversive – also the statist version claims to seek a 'post-capitalist transition' (SENPLADES, 2009). A more transformative form of fusion is pursued by means of discursive cross-fertilizing dialectics through two main mechanisms: first, the creative

[223] A *de facto* mechanism (rather than an intended strategy) for sustaining political fusion has been invoking a 'discourse-action gap', that is, a (principally remediable) deficit in implementation of a (principally valid or feasible) discourse; or else a time-delay – Correa's 'more extractivism (now) to get out of extractivism (later)' – to explain the inconsistencies between a radical discourse and a heavily watered-down political practice. The effect of such mechanisms is mixed: on the one hand, they enable the sustainment of a radical rhetoric, but in a post-structuralist conception of discourse they are better understood as forms of discursive cooptation.

tension between local and global. The discursive evolution of BV towards de-territorialization is resisted by (and consequently balanced through) indigenous groups foregrounding the local dimension. The introduction of the concept of *sumak kawsay* in the Sarayaku Manifesto of 2003, for example, could be understood as such an attempt to redirecting the political and discursive focus of CONAIE towards the rural and peripheral regions (Altmann, 2013b, p. 92). Yet the *'glocal'* re-signification of the concept of BV allowed CONAIE to integrate *sumak kawsay* in its struggle "for the construction of a post-capitalist and post-colonial society" based on a fundamental change of macro-level socio-economic structures. A second mechanism for discursive cross-pollination is the practice of discursive brokerage. Insider-outsider networks (which we already saw at action in the GT debate), for example, emerge through the mobility of persons across sectors and levels, while carrying worldviews, ideas and personal networks along with them, enabling transfer processes which enhance institutional flexibility and facilitate change (Parks & Roberts, 2010). The most evident example is perhaps Alberto Acosta's presidency of the Constitutional Assembly, bringing key ideas of the postdevelopmentalist strand of BV ("bio-centric turn") onto the agenda of the new Montecristi constitution. When Alberto Acosta and Mónica Chuji, two of the most vocal advocates of BV, divorced from Correa's government, in 2008, Marlon Santi – one of the authors of the Sarayaku Manifesto – became president of CONAIE, mainstreaming BV into the organized indigenous movement identity and strategy at Ecuadorian national level. BV was thus taken up as a central a concept in the discourse of the EIM at the same time it was substantially weakened in the government discourse. Another powerful example of discursive brokerage can be found around the juridical concept of 'rights of nature' (RoN), which is usually associated to indigenous cosmogonies, when it actually resulted from a *métissage* with discursive elements from 'deep ecology' (represented, i.a. by Arne Naess) through the political and discursive leverage of foreign environmental NGOs, particularly the Pachamama Alliance (Espinosa, 2015).

From a socio-structural perspective, cultural and political agonism is fueled through cultural and material structures. In the cultural realm, as we saw, the scarce integration of indigenous organizations into the social structure of their respective countries led them to define their own identity in opposition to the 'included' (Altmann, 2013b). A key reproductive mechanism here is communal cohesion. The *ayllus* constitute the organizational and identitary basis of collective life of the Andean aborigines (Altmann, 2013a, 2015a; Vega Camacho, 2012). In material terms, an important structural factor is the exogenous leverage enabled by the presence of international agents exerting influence, among other

things, through funding structures, as in the already mentioned case of development-funds bypassing the state and going directly to indigenous movements at the meso-organizational level. This support offered to BV advocates (in particular, indigenous and intellectuals) by de-localized, disengaged audiences, helping challenge local balance of power (Altmann, 2013a, p. 29).

Table 17: BV Articulation discourse-audiences

Disruptors ('unbuilding unsustainability')	**Generators ('building sustainability')**
• Ambivalence of BV as a floating signifier as alternative to conventional development • Empowered spaces of cultural and political alterity vis-à-vis the modern Western episteme • Exogenous levers (e.g. international funding) disrupting local balance of power • Creative-disruptive tension between local and global (or territorialized vs. de-territorialized versions of BV)	• Global spotlight-effect of political consensus and its institutional and juridical outputs ('biocentric' constitutional reform, government plans, etc.) • Insider-outsider networks (bidirectional between CS and government or among diverse CS discursive formations) • Strong communal cohesion for the reproduction of alternative lifeworlds and political organization (e.g. ayllus)

Obstacles to a fused performance of the BV discourse(s)

While the ambiguity of BV as a floating signifier was framed above as a mechanism for the sustainment of a minimalist and agonistic political fusion, the ensuing shallowness of the concept makes it prone to drifting into institutional and ideational inertias or path-dependencies – not to mention the risk of deliberate cooptation. For example, the Human Development policy-framework, as mentioned above, has been systematically used both in Bolivia and Ecuador by the UNDP Regional offices, blending-in elements from *sumak kawsay* and BV, as becomes apparent in their development programs, as well as in their Annual Development reports. Even if some level of cross-fertilization is observable, often the BV-wording is adopted to re-label the same old practices, as illustrated by the adoption of the language of the Social Solidarity Economy movement[224], which is prominent in the BV debate, with the promotion of an individualistic and market-based development style (e.g. micro-finance) which –

[224] For a background on the Social Solidarity Economy movement in Latin-America, see Mutuberría Lazarini & Plotinski (2015)

leaving apart the controversy about the relative success of such practices in their own terms – reveals, at the very least, a shallow engagement with the ideas of BV. (Carballo, 2015b).

An obstacle *contrario sensu* for the transformative fertility of BV is the risk of particularization of BV as an ethnocentric category, as an idiosyncratic or regressive utopia, which turns BV into an exotic product that is largely irrelevant for the Latin-American societies at large, let alone for the global sphere (Adrian E. Beling & Vanhulst, 2016a). This risk derives from the essentialist positions both from the indigenous side and from that of decolonial intellectuals, or from the framings of BV-detractors in the *mestizo* society (Vanhulst & Beling, 2014b).

The remaining risks identified here relate to the transfer of the discursive epicenter from civil society forces to the state. While we pointed out above that the 'revolving door' between civil society and the state has the effect of facilitating discursive cross-pollination and contagion effects, the catalyzing effect of BV being adopted as an official state program had a negative 'brain-draining' effect, effectively weakening alternative voices. This became especially problematic with the divorce between the state and its former social-movement base, with the latter turning into a protest tide increasingly criminalized by the former. This criminalization of protest meets international momentum with the revival of the 'democratic security doctrine' in the wake of the so-called 'war on terror', which introduces a discursive cleavage between the protection of civil population from upheavals and the respect of basic constitutional or human rights. (CAOI, 2008)

A last obstacle identified to the transformative learning potential of BV is, paradoxically, its very own political success. Indeed, the recent experience and memory of the success in taking-over the state apparatus through popular mobilization (Brand, 2015) blends out other alternatives in the pursuit of societal change, which could allow the circumvention of some of the abovementioned obstacles. This paradox is revisited and further reflected upon in Chapter 6.

5.6. Conclusions: collective learning through political mainstreaming?

This chapter started with the statement that BV raised worldwide attention after being mainstreamed into the political constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia. The statement simultaneously foregrounds key dimensions that serve as guidelines to conclude the chapter: how can the performativity of BV be assessed in terms of transformative learning and social change? How can the role of the state in the process be assessed? (or, more broadly formulated: the absorption of BV into the formal political

system). What relevant insights can be gained regarding the entanglements between the territorial context of emergence and the global sphere?

Regarding the performativity question, BV appears as both a product and a powerful source of cultural transformative waves, matching long marginalized voices from the global South with a global momentum for a discursive shift in the imaginary of development and modernity. This has arguably been and continues to be its main performativity, both as a social movement and as a political project. Indeed, BV can be considered as the first large-scale experiment discursively articulating modern and non-modern ontologies, not only at the ideational level but also in the institutional-material sphere, bridging the hitherto unbridgeable: the holistic, relational, circular, mystical world of the Andean ancestral traditions and the dualistic, individualistic, linear, and rational world of development, thereby unleashing a process of cross-fertilization or cultural learning. The provisional outcome has been variously referred to as a "retro-progressive utopia" (Serrano 1999, cited in Cortez, 2011), a "mobilizing illusion" (Fander Falconí) or a "real utopia" (René Ramírez) (Vanhulst, 2015, p. 11).

In the political-institutional terrain, BV came to 'disrupt politics as usual' (de la Cadena, 2010), issuing a domestic re-balancing of political forces. In its ambition regarding programmatic deliverables, however, the Ecuadorian and Bolivian experiments with BV simultaneously showcase the limitations of a political revolution without an effective transformation of the material base (Becker, 2011; Adrian E. Beling et al., 2018). The cultural effervescence unleashed by the intense social movement activity leading to the so-called "post-neoliberal" or "left turn" in the early 21st century Latin America comes into stark contrast with the *Realpolitik*-flavor of the path followed by the Correa and Morales administrations in Ecuador and Bolivia, respectively. To be sure, the translation of the BV discourse into the political arena necessarily implies a certain degree of ideologization, that may be unavoidable in order to accommodate the political logic of electoral competition and of programmatic government, at the price of introducing a level of rigidity, as well as pragmatic compromising (Monni & Pallottino, 2013). Yet of the constitutive elements of BV highlighted in the consensual 'hybrid BV' recognized in the constitution (harmony with nature, revaluation of marginalized voices, democratic autonomism, and the universal satisfaction of basic needs, in addition to the critique of Western-style development and cultural plurality), only the satisfaction of basic needs has been met to a significant degree, though arguably in a precarious, unsustainable manner. Furthermore, this came at the expense of the other dimensions, and at the cost of deepening dependence on international commodity-markets and locking the national economies further into the (neo)extractivist matrix. Moreover, steeply accumulating evidence contradicts the principle of harmony with nature and the recognition of rights

awarded to subaltern groups – let alone the inclusion of their values and practices. The contradictions between BV and the reinforced neo-extractivist economic model show that, for the time being, the logic of the "Commodity Consensus" prevails in government agendas over the regulative ideal of *Buen vivir* (Vanhulst & Beling, 2014b). Furthermore, these contradictions discredit the capacity of governments and social movements of effectively withstanding the omnipotence of markets and their neoliberal base

Does BV thus showcase a paradoxical inverse proportionality between political leverage and transformative impact? Answering this question lies beyond the scope of this research, and would not be possible based on the evidence collected alone. Yet BV does make a strong case, I argue, for inquiring into the conditions under which governance takes place, first: cultural and material preconditions to be fulfilled before a given political program can be translated into an effective governance action. The premature institutionalization of a transformative programme in the form of a political party would lead into the trap of mere 'politicking', i.e. political actors becoming divorced from social and ecological realities and being trapped in the political game (Blühdorn, 2007; Latouche, 2009). In addition, BV shows that once the state enters the realm of traditionally civil society activity (e.g. defense of environment), it tends to colonize or monopolize the transformative impulse, weakening other agents: "The experience of the progressive governments has opened many wounds, not only in the social movements and organizations but also in Latin American critical thought" (Svampa, 2016)

Regarding local-global entanglements, the BV debate brings the issue of the discursive locus of enunciation much more strongly to the foreground than the GT did. Indeed: BV is heavily influenced by the specific socio-historical heritage of the Latin-American region – and the Andean-Amazonian countries, more specifically –, as well as by their geopolitical and geo-economic situations in the (semi)periphery of the globalized capitalist economy. Historical experience of direct and structural oppression, exclusion, or subordination has left a strong cultural imprint leading to an unwavering discursive foregrounding of power relations and imbalances, more than is the case in the GT debate. Capitalism itself, for example, is framed not only as a system of production and consumption, but first and foremost as a system of power and domination (not least over nature) (Brand, 2015, p. 29). This gives way to a world of victims and victimizers: the country versus international imperialism, civil society vs state, minorities against majorities, marginal minorities vs. dominant minorities.

The locus of enunciation also shapes the ambivalent relationship towards development and modernity observed in the BV debate, wavering between outright rejection and long deferred aspiration.

Modernity is not only framed in universalistic (statist-socialist strand) or pluralistic terms (postdevelopmental strand), but also in particularistic anti-modern terms (indigenist strand), the latter not being present in the GT debate. As a transformation discourse, BV appears as caught in a double struggle against co-optation by either the universalistic premises of the republican liberal imaginary (including the standard pathway of seizing state-power in the hope of enacting transformations) or the reified ethnocentric particularisms and their illusions of self-determination.

Finally, as a discursive phenomenon emerging in peripheral countries, BV also showcases a much stronger mediation of the supra-national sphere in the situated process of discursive construction, where foreign forces feature as co-producers of discourse and as disruptors of the local balance of political forces. At the level of discursive representation, however, supra-territorial embeddedness is under-problematized: geopolitical and geo-economic entanglements are acknowledged at an abstract level of critique, but are not given serious enough analytical treatment to establish conditions of possibility for a social transformation (Adrian E. Beling et al., 2018). The aspiration of autonomy eventually proved illusory in the face of global imbrications.

The dramaturgical heuristics of the BV debate further yielded insights as to the *key enablers of transformative learning* at play. In terms of identitary shielding from mainstream forms of social status recognition in a capitalist society, the key role of larger societal sub-cultures allowing for alternative patterns of identity-ascription and recognition stand out as the most striking resource enabling social learning. While historically encapsulated as a parallel world (an 'island' rather than a 'peninsula'), the BV debate largely worked as a platform for epistemic and material convergence and inter-imbrication with the *mestizo* society. Uruguayan writer and activist Raul Zibechi even proposes replacing the conventional concept of social movement in the context of Latin-American transformations, as it cannot capture the extension or the depth of the phenomenon of what he calls, instead, "societies in movement" in Latin America (Zibechi & Nuin, 2008): a subset of social relations that differ from the hegemonic ones. Unlike the classical conception of social movements which understands them as means to struggle for the conquest of political power, the concept of "societies in movement" remits to the idea of social movements as "carriers of a different world" in motion, fighting a struggle with a disarticulating character, subverting institutionalized and naturalized symbolic orders: "We are on a civilizational debate in the continent. It is not simply to join the transition from capitalism to socialism, it is a much broader or different thing" (Santos, 2009).

In terms of political leverage, the BV debate snowballed societal forces into a critical mass for political change, empowering agents formerly conceived of as mere objects (rather than subjects) of politics

and policy-making. Hence BV generated not only a cognitive, but also a political democratization-effect, building-up intermediate political infrastructure and bridging rigid social hierarchies.

Precondition for the consolidation of such political leverage was the structural material shielding of revulsive discursive agents, chiefly the Indigenous movement. We analysed the most influential movement in the region, the Ecuadorean indigenous movement, and identified the singularity of its support base as a critical factor explaining its rise to societal and political prominence. With its inbuilt political and economic counter-weights, decoupling the satisfaction of basic needs of the member-base from the top of the pyramid (through strong communal cohesion in the *ayllus* and first tier organizations organizing the material reproduction of collective life at the local level), and harnessing international development funding as exogenous lever, this structure shields the indigenous movement from social humour, as well as from political and market pressure.

Another key enabler was the engagement of individual and organizational agents (indigenous and postdevelopmentalist intellectuals, as well as developmental and environmental organizations) to interpret and strategically harness the historical window of opportunity opened through the global-local convergence of an outside-inward global crisis of the development discourse (maldevelopment) and an inside-outward anti-neoliberalist momentum. In cultural terms, these agents can be described in terms of what in Chapter 4 we called "meaning-making elites", involving functions of translation (interpreting and articulating the specific sub-cultural codes of stakeholder groups), identity-brokerage (to facilitate mutual recognition processes), and creation of discursive corridors to enable dialogical engagement across the board. Politically, "decision-making elites" (Assadourian & The Worldwatch Institute, 2010; Stengel, 2011) translated this into building an anti-hegemonic balance through rallying heterogeneous social forces behind the floating signifier of BV against a strong 'common enemy': neoliberalism, leading to a disruption of "politics as usual", while strengthening domestic and global legitimacy.

Standing out as singular feature of BV as a transformation discourse was the State-impulse it received, endowing this social-ecological utopia with constitutional and institutional legitimacy, adopting an unconventional role as 'champion of nature', and giving BV a decisive push in terms of symbolic distribution (upscaling and international dissemination). Preconditions for this were the strategic generation of domestic political consensus and legitimacy in front of the global public sphere.

Finally, pivotal in the process of discursive assemblage or articulation – as well as in sustaining agonistic contention in the post-consensual phase – was the establishment of communicating vessels among the diverse discursive formations (insider-outsider networks, cross-pollination), as well as the

fact that BV became a bandwagoning-banner for other TDs or even for well-established reformist emancipatory discourses, such as the UNDP's Human Development.

The above enablers can be matched with characteristic particularized *roles and practices* of the three key agents identified in the BV debate: Civil society (local social movements and foreign NGOs), the state, and the intellectual sphere.

Civil society was observed to perform a complex role with at least three clearly distinguishable facets: a) as philosophical (civilizational critique, *sumak kawsay* utopia) and programmatic (Yasuní-ITT) architect of BV; b) reframed as "societies in movement", working as a ferment for the broader 'citizen revolution' and the 'cultural revolution' in Ecuador and Bolivia, respectively; and c) as a resistance agent against the perceived co-optation of BV by the state.

Regarding the enabling role of the state, we saw it had a pivotal role in scaling and re-framing BV into a narrative of macro-societal (also global) relevance; and that the legitimacy and visibility it acquired through state sponsorship prompted a global snowball of academic reflections, activist initiatives, and a renewed political rhetoric. This of the state can be understood as the positive byproduct of a largely failed implementation attempt, alongside the mentioned negative byproducts of monopolizing (and degrading) the transformative impulse and damaging the credibility of BV as a cognitive project. The role of the state is thus still a *sine qua non* enabling role in triggering a large-scale learning process; just not the straightforward type of performativity conventionally expected from the state.

The intellectual sphere, in turn, particularly public scholars closer either to the movements or to the governments, was shown to provide substantial inputs to the process of societal reflection, as well as for its political mobilization. The leading role of Alberto Acosta in both fronts is illustrative. However, unlike in the case of GT, there is hardly any strategic-analytical inputs as inputs to the programmatic debate around the idea of a transformation here, as indicated by the virtually total absence of 'blueprints' for BV. Rather, under the apparent influence of postcolonial thought, these intellectuals engage in far-reaching deconstructive, philosophical-critical work (chiefly, the diagnosis of "civilizational crisis"), thus playing a stronger role in terms of 'unbuilding unsustainability' (what we called *disruptors*), than in 'building sustainability' (*generators*). To be sure, he idea of BV as social-ecological utopia is largely a product of academic reflection, as well, but it remains more of an abstract vision than a solid programmatic proposal.

PART III

Para-governance for a social-ecological transformation

CHAPTER 6

"Great Transformation" and Buen vivir: lessons learned for advancing transformative collective learning

Utopia is in the horizon. If I take two steps towards it, it recedes two steps, and the horizon moves ten steps farther. So what is utopia good for? Precisely for that: for walking.
Eduardo Galeano (1993)

6.1. Introductory remarks

Having reviewed the case studies of BV and GT in Chapters 3 to 5 of Part II, the empirical insights gained feed into this chapter seeking to answer our general research question: how to foster transformative CLPs; that is, by implication, how to foster transformative agency and socio-ecological utopias.

To this purpose, the present chapter merges the lessons gained separately from the situated debates of BV and GT, bringing them into resonance with each other by comparing the respective enablers distilled from the dramaturgical analyses of each case, and seeking to abstract insights that would shed light on the more general phenomenon of the 'enabling of transformative learning processes'. Needless to say, such broad comparison is compelled to highlight commonalities at the cost of downplaying important differences and details, yet such sacrifice is tailored to the requirements of our research interests. Detailed empirical insights are rather to be retrieved from Part II.

Given the abrupt disparity not only of both cases, but also of our methodological way of approaching their study, this 'mutual dialogical engagement' of both case studies rests methodically on the common dramaturgical categories utilized, triangulated by insights from relevant literature. In addition, excerpts from the various data samples second-level coded with the labels 'para-governance' (see Chapter 7), 'insightful quotation', 'hypothesis supporting', and 'hypothesis rectifying' were also incorporated to the analysis. Lastly, ethnographic observations from my own experience in the field and from exploratory interviews also come into play at this final stage of integral analysis.

The chapter is organized as follows: Section 6.2 starts comparing-contrasting the GT and BV debates regarding the assessment of the learning effects observed. Section 6.3 undertakes a work of summarization and abstraction of the enablers distilled in chapters 4 and 5, following the sequence of steps used for dramaturgical analysis in said chapters as systematization- and display-tool for easier

linking with the two empirical chapters, as well as a clearer oversight. It finishes by condensing and clustering these enablers into three categories: structural, situational (or contingent), and agential. Section 6.4 further zooms into the agential dimension by modelling types of agency, providing an answer to the sub-research questions regarding how the predicament transformative agency (cf. Chapter 2) is addressed in the case studies, and outlining ideal-typical agent-configurations and their distinctive dynamics (agent-roles and -practices).

6.2. Conceptualizing collective learning in the wake of the BV and the GT debates

Drawing on Maarten Hajer's categorization, the effects of learning in the GT-case are better described with the concept of *discourse structruration*, i.e. that the discourse has influenced how the world is conceptualized by a given social collective (the axial themes distilled from our main data corpus are already indicators), while the effects of learning in the case of BV can be understood in terms of *discourse institutionalization*, that is, that the discourse has shaped patterns of institutionalization and the organization or social practices (biocentric constitutions, RoN, Yasuní-ITT, programmatic policy contents oriented by BV, etc.). To be sure, the GT debate also features emergent material dispositifs in the form of cross-over networks (*Wachstumswende*, *Konzeptwerk neue Ökonomie*), deliberative platforms (WiW Austria, *Forschungswende*), research agendas (PhD programs on the GT in Heinrich-Böll and Rosa-Luxemburg foundations) and organizational units (DFG-research college on post-growth societies), new civil society movements (Degrowth, commons, *Wir haben es satt*), initiatives (Smart CSOs) and organizations (P2P Foundation), as well as policy-programs (Plan B from *Die Linke*) and blueprints (UBI); however, such material impacts are more disperse, less systematic, and less relevant for society as a whole as compared to those featured in the case of BV. This by no means implies that such effects are less remarkable or less fertile from a perspective of learning potential; rather, these differential impacts are consistent with the dissimilar modes of discursive articulation observed in both cases.

Indeed, the integration of BV into the political process of the 'left turn' in Ecuador and Bolivia meant that the diverse stakeholder audiences (indigenous, non-indigenous ethnic minorities, urban bourgeoisie, environmentalist groups, etc.) are now integrated into a single constituency, and thus articulated through a vertical logic of aggregation, which rests on the alignment of a critical mass of votes behind a candidate in the logic of electoral competition. The pattern is thus one of *vertical articulation*. In the GT debate, in turn, articulation proceeds through a rather lateral logic of contagion.

The production of anti-hegemonic (sub)political discourse occurs in networked social and institutional structures, with patterns of affiliation, organization, identity building, and discursive production that differ from the logic of a *demos* (though superimposed onto and imbricated with it). The pattern of social construction of TDs here comes closer to Manuel Castells' (2000) description of a *network society*. The organizing principle is not that of the critical mass, but that of a 'critical yeast' (Lederach, 2003) which contains the potential to eventually leaven the masses – hence the importance of extension and exogamy of networks beyond 'small worlds' to strengthen both the network's resilience and leverage (Granovetter, 1973). The logic of contagion also accounts for the talk about 'social labs' and 'protected spaces for experimentation' (Grießhammer & Brohmann, 2015; Hassan, 2014), 'pioneers' (WBGU, 2011, 2014) or 'seeds of change' (Narberhaus & Sheppard, 2015) and, more generally, the centrality of complexity and systems-thinking (Graham, 2010; D. Meadows, 1999; Westley et al., 2011). Consequently, the pattern in GT is one of *horizontal articulation*.

From a cultural rather than a political perspective, in turn, GT and BV can be framed and compared as cases of what I will call 'endogenous' versus 'exogenous learning', respectively. *Endogenous learning* constitutes a self-regulated constructive process of societal self-observation, which can be linked back to the concept of 'reflexive modernization' (Beck et al., 2003, 1994). Risk society – in particular what we have termed geostorical challenges – constitute the disturbance factor unsettling the prevailing order and putting a learning process into motion. The process is not uncontentious, but, as a whole, it can be seen as a Schumpeterian "regenerative self-destruction" of Western-style modernity, whereby the "social imaginary signifiers" fundamentally characterizing the modern *ethos* – Castoriadis (1990) condensed them into two: autonomy and rational control of the world – are re-signified, rather than inherently challenged: autonomy is re-conceived in terms of interdependence, and rational control of the world shifts primarily from an outer control over nature to an inner control of ourselves to safeguard natural life-support system from anthropogenic threats (Adrian E. Beling et al., 2014; Pelfini, 2013). Hence the preferred discursive mechanism described in Chapter 3 as drawing on the 'surplus of meaning' of modern values as a source of cultural renewal.

Exogenous learning, in turn, refers to the inter-imbrication of dissimilar cultural models or social worlds (Bajoit, 2011; Bajoit et al., 2008), with often conflictive epistemological and ontological foundations (Escobar, 2011, 2012b; Rehbein, 2010, 2013). Furthermore, in terms of its discursive representations, BV constitutes a paradoxical discursive product, insofar it turns the alleged incompatibility between the cultural matrixes of indigenous traditional cultures and that of modernity into the source of innovation and radical renewal of the latter (Carballo, 2015a). Exogenous learning oscillates between

the fusion or hybridation of plural cultural sources (García Canclini, 2001) and the agonistic coexistence of multiple parallel worlds, which has no synthesis-solution, but rather remain in a sustained state of creative tension (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2010b).

The above differences notwithstanding, both cases similarly showcase learning effects in terms of creating "docking points for the politization of alleged lack of alternatives" (Brand), and fostering a more or less broad social debate on emancipatory alternatives and the need to link them with a project of societal restructuration (Aparicio Wilhelmi, 2013; Institut Solidarische Moderne, 2011, p. 29), "transforming a resigned sense that 'there is no alternative' into an inspiring belief that 'another world is possible'" (Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014, p. 141). The starting place, Tim Jackson says, "must be to confront the structures that keep us in damaging denial". (Jackson, 2009a, p. 102). Their major contribution lies in them opening up "a space for the inventiveness and creativity of the imagination, which has been blocked by economistic, developmentalist and progressive totalitarianism" (Latouche, 2009, p. 9), enlarging "horizons of expectation" and demonstrating political and moral dissent (WBGU, 2014, p. 4), thus creating preconditions for agonism. Alone rendering alternatives visible is an important task, given the 'spiral of scilence' of political elites and mainstream media (Brand, 2014a; Ronzheimer, 2013). In so doing, GT and BV have opened the possibilities for dialogue (Acosta, 2011, p. 55), for a discursive democracy (Dryzek, 2000). From a perspective of collective learning, more relevant than the dubious success of failure at implementation by any particular actors, I would argue, is the collectively shared sense of "getting to maybe". (Westley, Patton, & Zimmerman, 2007)

6.3. Enablers of transformative collective learning: lessons from BV & GT

Narrative plausibility: Articulation of discursive representations with background culture

The GT and BV discourses introduce elements 'imported' from a locus of alterity – indigenous nations (BV) or anti-systemic scholarly circles, social movements, or niches of alternative practice (GT) – into the discursive landscape of their respective societies, problematizing issues of political, economic or socio-cultural exclusion – that is, issues of *social justice* – or the cultural blind spots or biases that constitute a potential threat to the survival of society itself, related to the 'boomerang effect' of

(unequal) affluence (Beck, 1992), thematized by various authors either as 'overdevelopment'[225] or 'maldevelopment' (Svampa & Viale, 2014b; Tortosa, 2001) – following the distinction introduced in Chapter 2, we can call these *social pathologies*. In the cases at hand, problematized pathologies revolve mainly around blind spots in issues of global interdependence – critically, interlocking global environmental changes, but also the misrecognition of global economic imbrications, which was identified as a blind spot of the BV discourse in Chapter 5 – or of unequally distributed vulnerabilities. This implies active contestation at the symbolic level, going beyond the dominant Zeitgeist to shift public debate "from false opposites towards the true contradictions (Brand, Pühl, et al., 2013, p. 81)

This has not led to a shift in discursive hegemony, but rather to a situation of discursive agonism: critical discourses highlighting power and domination are confronted with the demand to acknowledge interdependencies (e.g. indigenist strands of BV challenged by postdevelopmentalist ones), and naïve cosmopolitanism ('we are all on the same boat') is confronted with the demand to acknowledge that the society is complex, contradictory, and unequal (rather than just 'multiple') (Aguilar et al., 2015, p. 124). The resulting setting of discursive confrontation and diversification (hence the definition of BV and GT 'debates' as case studies) destabilizes the prevalent symbolic order, thus allowing conditions for collective learning.

Yet coupled with this destabilizing critique of the unsustainable dominant symbolic order (which we have called *disruptors*), our TDs offer a discursive *generator*, a cultural promise: that, which the symbolic project at stake is offering, contains the seed for a more comprehensive and more sustainable realization of the good life. In both cases, the idea of the 'good life' is opposed to that of a 'better life' characteristic of current trends towards increased utilitarianism, economicism, and commodification of all aspects of life (Sandel, 2013). However, a more specific framing of their respective ideas about the good life is tailored, in each case, to be recognizable for their respective audiences: in the case of BV, by retrieving the ancient traditions of indigenous populations – still much alive in the Andean *ayllus*), in various partly overlapping and partly competing articulations with Western frames (developmental, environmental); and in the case of GT, rehabilitating the old Aristotelean *eudaimonia* and multiple other sources of cultural contestation, especially from the 1970s (Asara et al., 2015), but

[225] The idea of overdevelopment is theorized especially by in environmental, postcolonial, and Marxist scholars, but increasingly entering the mainstream especially due to ecological impacts of overconsumption or hyper-consumption. (i.a. Catton, 1982; Giddens, 2011)

increasingly also exploring Europe's pre-industrial *epistemes*[226]. In the same vein, the assimilation of the BV discourse within the GT debate (which motivated the inclusion of Acosta, 2015a into our sample for the analysis of GT representations) foregrounded elements such as harmony with the social and natural environment, rights of nature, and the 'wisdom' of non-modern worldviews, while the postcolonial 'hermeneutics of suspicion' that characterizes the BV debate in Latin America recedes in the background.

Opportunity: Articulation of discursive representations with the contingent situation

Similarly, the contingent situations sparking off the GT and BV debates, respectively, are discursively elaborated for enabling a deeper societal self-reflection process. The spark is, in both cases, a situation of (perceived) acute crisis – the region-wide collapse of the neoliberal experiment of the 1990s, in the case of BV, and the Great Recession, in the GT debate. The apparent systemic nature of these crises opens up a historical window of opportunity for the emergence of re-foundational narratives. In the GT debate, the crisis is framed in the broader context of the breakdown of the post-war class-compromise in Europe (Dörre et al., 2015; Streeck, 2011), which becomes apparent in the accelerating widening of the 'inequality gap' (Oxfam, 2016; Piketty, 2014; Woodward, 2015), and of the global ecological crisis, especially with the mainstreaming of climate change by mid-2000s and the failure of multilateral (sustainability) governance, evidenced with the failure of the Copenhagen climate summit in 2009. In the BV debate, the proximate trigger of the anti-neoliberal tide was discursively elaborated as a more fundamental crisis of 'maldevelopment' (Svampa & Viale, 2014b; Tortosa, 2009), in the context of a global legitimacy crisis of the development discourse, with the ecological discourse of international environmental NGOs finding resonance with that of indigenous organizations, not least as a lever for their claims to territorial autarchy as 'wardens of nature'. The narrative output were the diagnoses of a 'multiple interlinked crisis' and of a 'civilizational crisis', respectively, as points of departure for a societal self-reflexivity and cultural critique.

Yet beyond these ideational exercises, the articulation of the two TDs with their respective contingent situations of emergence also has a practical dimension, which consists in mobilizing and organizing

[226] This trend is illustrated by the philosophical explorations of Baroque culture as a source of cultural renewal in current times; see for example the work by Hersche (2011) or Echeverría (2000).

latent discursive forces to join the debate, thus strengthening its cultural and political leverage of TDs. We saw that the build-up of a network of mutual reference (in the form of content-carrying dispositifs such as official reports, books, manifestos, grey literature, etc.; deliberative events; programmatic orientations in research, civil society action, or research; etc.), the existence of catalysing instances (policy proposals, such as Yasuní-ITT, work reduction, or UBI; institutionalization such as the constitutional assemblies in Ecuador and Bolivia, or the *Energiewende* in Germany), and clustering platforms (e.g. the Degrowth movement or CONAIE), with the condensation of the above in time (we called it 'synchronization') providing for the momentous character of discussion, thus provoking the destabilizing effect on the dominant symbolic order and triggering the learning process. Last but not least, the articulation of discourse and situational contingence implies identifying and harnessing political windows of opportunity. In BV, this took the shape of a political project put in the hands of governments put in power by party-movements, while in the case of GT the most transcendent political instance was the Enquete-WWL. While the success of BV as a political program was limited, at best, from a perspective of collective learning the main effect of the state-adoption of both BV and the GT, as argued below, was endowing the respective debates with entity, visibility, and legitimacy.

Legitimation: Articulation of discursive representations with performing actors

The issue of legitimacy is, as we saw, a central one both in Alexander's theoretical framework and in the empirical case studies. Indeed, the capability of proposing symbolic contestations that challenge mainstream culture and seek to re-signify collective self-understandings is not to be taken for granted. In order for such cultural challenges to be seen as acceptable, credible, and thus produce effects of cultural extension and psychological identification on the part of intended audiences, the discursive agents (or performing actors, in the language of dramaturgies) need to be endowed with some form of legitimacy in the eyes of society. Such legitimacy may be drawn from diverse sources: in the GT debate, we saw science, as the culturally most authoritative source of knowledge, taking up a prominent role as legitimacy-provider; not only the biophysical sciences with ground-breaking and inherently critical concepts such as *Anthropocene*, *planetary boundaries*, or *Great Acceleration*, but also the social sciences (Jevon's paradox, Easterlin paradox, etc.) contribute to a re-shaping of deep cultural structures (Beck, 2015b; WBGU, 2011). Hence, the scientific discourse, making use of its culturally-conferred authority, can advance TDs themselves (e.g. 'transformative science') and legitimize other TD-agents. But there are other sources of legitimacy, such as establishing links with socially or politically established or highly reputed institutions or ideas, as illustrated clearly, in the case of BV,

with the purposeful linkage to the Human Development approach of the UNDP (drawing on Sen/Nussbaum), or to the Aristotelian *eudaimonia* (Bretón et al., 2014). Also the existence of hybrid cultures (Avritzer, 2002; García Canclini, 2004) or pluri-epistemic cultures containing an 'other' to society *within* society (perfect illustration being the concept of plurinationality) (Altmann, 2013b) can be a source of legitimacy: the existence of a (more or less influential) sub-set of non-hegemonic social relations within the larger society de facto creates an exogenous vantage point for societal self-observation and critique. When this 'other' is an excluded one, as is typically the case with ethnic minorities long excluded from political representation and culturally segregated in the *mestizo* society of Latin American countries, the wholesale critique of the dominant cultural model ('social pathologies') is combined with (and sometimes obscured by) a critique of social injustices[227], leading – as was indeed the case with BV – to a process of political change, a "disruption of politics as usual" (de la Cadena 2010). In any of these cases, cultural and political democratization becomes a mechanism for legitimation. Similarly, as mentioned above, both in BV and in GT (though to diverse extent), the state plays a decisive role as a legitimacy-provider, be it though its intervention as discourse producer (especially in BV) and/or backing up the discourse through attaching its 'seal of approval': this is most evident in the case of BV, where a full-fledged political democratic legitimation is achieved through the enactment of a new constitution, but it can also be observed in the GT debate with the instantiation of the Enquete-WWL or the Growth in Transition (WiW) initiative of the Austrian Life-Ministry, but also with much smaller gestures such as attaching an organizational logo indicating sponsorship of a ministry (BMBF, BMZ, SENPLADES) or a technical agency (UBA, DFG) to a civil society or academic initiative (e.g. Post-growth research group at Jena University).

Another form of legitimation not based on drawing on a source of authority, as the above cases, but on being awarded *credibility*. In GT, for example, we see this mechanism at action in the invocation of dystopias of stagnating growth prospects, industry 4.0 (a 'push' factor), and/or in the 'pull' of plausible utopias such as *collaborative commons* enabled by a digital modernity and the Internet of Things. In BV,

[227] This logic of legitimation based on amassing a 'critical mass' was also at work with the mass counter-cultural movements of the 1970 in Europe – the so-called 68-generation. These counter-cultural movements sought to exert a seductive influence over the larger society, which eventually resulted in partial recognition of some of the 'soft' cultural demands, and co-optation of the 'harder' transformative socio-economic demands (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005). However, unlike the ethnic minorities in Latin America, the 'cultural revolution' of the 68-generation was not based on claims of social exclusion, but rather on a cultural critique to the Fordist culture; i.e. it was not grounded on issues of social justice, but on issues of social pathologies.

this credibility is granted through the promise incarnated in a party-movement like *Alianza-País* in Ecuador or MAS in Bolivia. Similarly, the perceived *authenticity* of discursive performers is another source of credibility that enables dramaturgical fusion, as we see in the profiling of Bolivian president Evo Morales as the "first indigenous president" of the country, or in Rafael Correa as *caudillo* of the Ecuadorean 'citizen revolution', but also in the perceived neutrality of scientists or else in the general cultural praise of individuals seen as authentic and coherent ('walking your talk') (J. Sachs, 2012; Taylor, 1994). A noteworthy difference between both cases in terms of the credibility of future prospects of change is that the amalgamation of BV with a political project locates the prospect of fundamental changes in the immediate future (whose failure would largely explain the increasing disenchantment with BV since the divorce between the governments of Bolivia and Ecuador and their former respectively supportive social movements – see Chapter 5), while in GT that expectation is located in an indefinite future. The credibility based on plausibility of radical change in the future can be underpinned, in any case, through embracing the idea of the "futurization of politics", that is, through the endogenization of radical uncertainty and a corresponding reconceptualization of time in political deliberation and practice. This would translate into "taking a specific time-related plan or action with the aim of coping better with the uncertainties of the future", with tight deadlines in long-term policy help mitigate procrastination and demagogy" (Marks et al. 2006; Haderlapp/Trattnig 2013, cited in Reisch & Bietz, 2014, p. 31). The development and mainstreaming of management, planning, and communication tools such as *backcasting* (the exercise of backwards-planning departing from an envisioned long-term goal retrospective, instead of doing it from the present situation) would be fit for purpose.

Power: Articulation of discursive representations with powers of symbolic production/ distribution interpretation

In order to successfully perform a discursive challenge of culture, however, more is required than, legitimacy, authority, or credibility in front of the audience. Power leverage (including material resources) is needed as well for advancing the discursive prospects of a SET in society. Alexander's categorial framework distinguished three dimensions of power as relevant for the successful advancement of symbolic projects (i.e. fused discursive performances): the power of symbolic production, of distribution, and of interpretation. A remarkable parallel we could abstract from both case studies is that these three dimensions of power rest on an infrastructure combining some form of *shielding* from economic, political, and cultural conformity-pressures with some form of *leverage* over

culture and, in the case of BV, over politics. The shielding-dimension provides for the independent production of symbolic contents, i.e. for discursive diversity, preserving spaces of alterity vis-à-vis mainstream culture as discursive breeding grounds, and also deflects certain types of censorship (J. C. Alexander, 2004). In our analyses of the debates around BV and GT we also included in this shielding dimension the sustainability of this capacity for independent, uncensored discursive production over time, that is, the capacity of material self-reproduction of TD-agents. The leverage-dimension, in turn, enables the dissemination of symbolic contents through communicating vessels with the public sphere and the institutional sphere of society at large. In both cases, the enabling infrastructure combines the strength of hierarchical structures exerting significant political (indigenous movement in BV) or economic leverage (churches in GT) with the distributed agency of networked structures (NGOs and micro-level initiatives). This combination allows the separation between material and symbolic power, enabling the emergence of *meaning-making elites* (Assadourian & The Worldwatch Institute, 2010; Brohmann & David, 2015; Stengel, 2011) – i.e. a special type of elites who exert influence as discourse-shaping persons drawing on their symbolic, cultural, social capital, regardless of their economic or political power (be it indigenous organizations or Transition Towns)–, on the one hand, and a relatively more distributed power for symbolic production, on the other. Multi-level, cross-scale, matrixial organizations rendering base-membership support less dependent on aggregate macro-policy positions of the organizational top; and a structure of material self-reproduction relatively autonomous from both, seem crucial (Altmann, 2013a, p. 15; Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014, p. 142). In the case of the GT debate, shielding is granted mainly by CSOs with resilient and independent funding structures (e.g. tax-based in churches, the development sector, and the political foundations) and no vested interests in continuous escalation. In the case of BV, mainly through the peculiar organizational structure of the nationally and regionally organized indigenous movement – with its inbuilt political (three-tier structure) and economic (second tier direct recipient of international development funds) counter-weights –, on the one hand, and its identity boundary-construction, on the other, largely working as a shield against social-conformity pressures and against resource access-constraints (Altmann 2013). The above shielding mechanisms – many others could and should be added in the interest of transformative collective learning –, however, can simultaneously be seen as shielding the interests of future generations and politically unrepresented 'others' from the abuses of present and empowered political actors. They can be seen as particular cases of what Avner Offer called "societal commitment devices": institutional structures of society preventing "myopic" choices undermining long-term social goals for the sake of short-term pursuits; that is, "mechanisms which make it a little

easier for us to curtail our appetite for immediate arousal and protect our own future interests, and indeed the interests of affected others, including future generations" (Jackson, 2009a, p. 95)

Leverage, in turn, is provided for by the high-capillarity distribution infrastructure that these structures have, which serves not only for the diffusion of institutionalized patterns, but also for the aggregation and systematization of micro-experiments (Ronzheimer, 2013). From an agential rather than structural vantage point, the maximization of leverage is a function of, the identification of central arenas of intervention and key leverage points– 'fights worth fighting' – from a systemic perspective (Biermann, 2011b; Grießhammer & Brohmann, 2015; Hackmann & St. Claire, 2012; Narberhaus & Sheppard, 2015). In the sense of collective learning, this includes not only (or mainly) institutional or policy shifts, but also fights that can shift the logic of the debate and make room for transformative narratives to emerge. (Narberhaus & Sheppard, 2015, p. 58)

With regard to interpretative power, the sheer extension of these structures – say, the communication network of the churches, the academic, or the development sector – also makes it possible, especially in hierarchical ones, to provide vast yet captive publics with clues and orientation for discursive interpretation, as the structure allows for a rapid spread of communications. Yet while the above structures largely running parallel (i.e. bypass) the communication infrastructure of the state and the mass media, thus preserving relative independence in the message-contents (shielding)(Stengel, 2011, p. 313), grey-literature, scientific reports, and deliberative forums cannot compete with the latter in outreach and scope (leverage), and – most importantly, perhaps – in their role of providing a cultural compass and normative orientation to the masses. It is thus perhaps in terms of hermeneutic power where TDs are the weakest, in terms of symbolic capacities. Indeed: the role of mass media was not found to be prominent, in general, neither in BV nor in GT. This should not come as surprise: Media actors (including journalists, film- and TV-scriptwriters, advertising agencies, etc.) are unlikely to pick up a topic like, say, sufficiency, and play a multiplier-role for at least two structural reasons: insofar abiding to the commercial logic of business enterprises, the logic of the media is not an emancipatory one, but a seductive one, aimed at maximizing audience rating (Bourdieu, 2011)(cf. Chapter 4, Section 4.3 on obstacles to a fused performance).

Hence the media feature novel, attractive, controversial themes arousing the interest of the masses. Secondly, the logic of the "news" – and this pertains not only 'vertical' mass media, but also 'horizontal' social media – has a short-term resonance built-in: whatever news shine under the spot of

the media are perceived as important by the public at large, changing perceptions, eventually gaining political relevance and sometimes leading to reforms, but only insofar the topic remains news-relevant: as soon as the spot is off, the perception arises that it has lost importance. Themes in the purview of the Public sphere are thus short-lived, and, as a result, the dictates of public opinion are ruled by a capricious up-and-down dynamics (Stengel, 2011, p. 315). It follows that, for the two reasons exposed, diffuse, and complex problems which confront our own constituency as societies and individuals are not amenable to the typical dynamics of news. According to Christiane Graefe[228], a senior journalist at the German newspaper *Die Zeit*, the potentiation of mechanisms we have observed incipiently at action in our case studies could help strategically advance a more functional medialization of the GT debate: one way is fueling the politization of the topic (i.e. bring controversy to scale); another is connecting abstract GT narratives to more concrete, catalyzing topics: e.g. sufficiency or 'time prosperity' could be broken down into topics such as factory farming or parental leave, respectively, which are firmly anchored in the public sphere, or with the critical mass movement reclaiming public space for bicycle traffic from cars to challenge the dominant discourse on mobility. 'Connecting the dots' in a broader transformation narrative would turn what would otherwise be a linear, incrementalistic approach into a transformative one. Catalytic and clustering initiatives and practices serve the additional purpose of structurally limiting censorship, due to the seemingly reformist character of "non-reformist reforms" (Bond, 2009; Gorz, 1964; G. Speth, 2016). A third mechanism is the strategic framing (WBGU, 2011) mentioned in Chapter 3: "less is more", for example, was a popular but sterile ascetic frame coming from religious circles three decades ago; today, however, it has been reframed as "the fatigue of clutter" *("Überdruss am Überfluss")*, which is a common experience (certainly at least in youth/student milieus who seek minimalistic lifestyles) to which people can connect. This goes in line with the positive framing of sufficiency alluded to in Chapter 3: sufficiency is not about curtailment, but rather about respecting the right "not to be forced to be willing to have ever more" (U. von Winterfeld's 'right to sufficiency' argument), or enlarged: "everybody has the right not to be forced to live at the expense of others". Here sufficiency becomes a moral argument against egoism, and a social-justice argument against discrimination. This strategic, systemic view is by and large missing, however, in the practice of self-denominated transformative or 'change agents' (Fuhr, Unmüßig, Heidel, Maier, & Martens, 2013; Narberhaus & Sheppard, 2015). Examples of

[228] Speech delivered at a panel discussion organized by BUND and the Heinrich-Böll Foundation on the political communication of sufficiency, held in Berlin on 27.01.16

transformative agents starting to walk this path in our case studies are Welzer's foundation *Futurzwei,* which seeks to convey the positive framing about sufficiency as involving not only *less* (material resources, mobility, animal protein) but also *more* (justice, happiness, freedom); Pope Francis encyclical, public intellectuals advocating a social-ecological transformation (e.g. our well-known figures Latouche, Acosta, Schneidewind, Tim Jackson), or the campaign "Keep it in the ground" by the British newspaper *The Guardian*.

As the above illustrates, the production of a persistent, coherent, and focused communication of TDs required to shift public opinion and therethrough gaining political leverage (Stengel, 2011) would require a combination of increased medialization and the creation of new agoras making the voices demanding and reflecting on a GT heard (Ronzheimer, 2013), as well as new formats tailored for stimulating deliberation and underpinning the dissemination of TDs (Grießhammer & Brohmann, 2015), such as the mainstreaming of the abovementioned *backcasting* as a method of political communication (Raskin, 2008; Reisch & Bietz, 2014, p. 32).

Last but not least, the role of the state entering the arena as discourse producer, hermeneut and distributor, as we observed especially in the case of BV, has had mixed effects: on the one hand, it helped fast-track, amplify, and – particularly important – generated multiplier effect and opened new communicative vessels with a multiplicity of actors (i.e. potentiated leverage), but the consensus-proneness of the political system compromised discursive independence and diversification, giving way to a watered-down strand of BV which is irreconcilable with the practice of neo-extractivism (Gudynas, 2011c). The ambiguous role of the state is analyzed in further detail below.

Bridging: Articulation of discursive representations with intended audiences

Beyond the general-purpose infrastructure mentioned above for discourse production, distribution, and interpretative guidance, targeted audiences or publics are diverse in their social-structural configuration, and, accordingly, relate diversely to the inputs of TDs: with ignorance, indifference, resistance, passive acceptation or active adoption and advocacy, etc. We learned from our case studies that there are (in practice or in discursive representations) diverse possible approaches for transformative agency to sensitize dissimilar publics to TDs.

One approach is generating socio-cognitive bridges, as we explored at length in Chapter 3. Even if diverse publics do not share the same narratives, they might still share deeper interpretative templates or frames, phenomenal or categorial structures, or some other form of discursive affinity. So for

example Degrowth became "both a banner associated with social and environmental movements and an emergent concept in academic and intellectual circles, [which] are interdependent and affect each other" (Martinez Alier et al. 2010, cited in Asara et al., 2015, p. 3), while BV draws on a hitherto regarded as implausible alliance between the indigenous movement and the development sector. In GT, our analysis clearly showed these affinity structures among the four narrative strands of Green Economy, Conservative Contraction, Green Society, and P2P Society, and illustrated possible meaning-bridging possibilities with the visual metaphor of puzzle pieces. In the case of frames, for example, GE and CC share the same understanding of modernity, despite advocating opposite courses of action, while GE and GS share an emancipatory frame, but understand modernity in different ways. CC and GS, in turn, share the same eco-centered conception of 'realism', while GE and P2P have a more pragmatic understanding.

While the pre-defined categories from secondary literature on which we based our analysis of BV did not allow for such detailed analysis, the broad points of convergence and divergence among the 'BV polyhedron' (i.e. primordial, hybrid, statist, indigenist, postdevelopmentalist strands of BV) also became apparent: so, for example, the primordial, postdevelopmental, and hybrid variants share a pluralistic conception of modernity, whereas the statist strand remains anchored in the classical, rather universalistic understanding of modernity; and the indigenist strand wages wholesale war on modernity, framing both their own traditions and that of modernity (conceived exclusively in terms of Western diffusionism) in a reified, essentialist fashion (Pelfini, 2013; Vanhulst & Beling, 2014a). Yet indigenists and postdevelopmentalists exhibit large coalition potential in terms of preferred courses of action, as illustrated by the case of the adoption of the deep-ecologists' 'rights of nature' framework by indigenous organizations during the constitutional debate (Espinosa, 2015). The case of 'rights of nature' also displays the central role of discursive facilitation and mediation, in this case to harmonize diverse territorial-discursive coordinates: as a *glocal* discursive production, the 'rights of nature' balance local needs (territorial and socio-economic autonomy or pluri-ethnicity) with a de-localized, global context (centrality of inter-culturality in the development cooperation discourse; restatement of the socio-sphere/biosphere equation) (Altmann, 2013b, pp. 284, 296; Bretón et al., 2014, p. 16).

In the same vein, debates over 'hot' policy-issues show that catalyzing initiatives also serve as discursive bridges: instead of the whole interpretative repertoire of a discourse coming into play, only particular aspects or dimensions relevant for handling the issue at hand are foregrounded, thus reducing the chances of conflictive overlapping. As Appadurai (2006) points out, understanding too

much about one's interlocutor can be as damaging to dialogue as understanding too little. So, for example, in GT we find that short-term prescriptions of both growth-critics (GS) and green Keynesians (GE) are largely convergent (Schmelzer & Passadakis, 2011, p. 45); while facing long-term discursive bridging conservative (CC) and emancipatory growth critics (GS) can align to oppose political counterweight or else to support intervention proposals for materially austere lifestyles and roll-back of growth. The P2P narrative, in turn, offers a tangential path to ease political tension between GE, on the one hand, and the 'convenience marriage' of CC and GS, on the other.

Beyond discursive-cognitive bridges, however, there are *identity boundaries* that discourse-performing actors must be able to cross. Schellnhuber's insightful remark that "the right proposal will be rejected if it comes from the wrong party" (*Discussion between Hans-Joachim Schellnhuber and Katja Kipping at the Conference "Genug für Alle□"Sozial.öko.logisch,"* 2017) speaks of the importance of understanding established cultural and political rituals. Transcending the boundaries of tight identity groupings will often require blurring or erasing narrow identity markers from transformative proposals. Multiple and diverse discursive anchorages, for example, reduce the risk of discursive confinement to parochial circles of 'usual suspects' or 'tribes' (Thompson, 1984).

The opposite effect is elicited when TDs are advocated by 'unusual suspects' or when agents take up unconventional roles: the chains of equivalence bi-univocally linking certain agents to certain ideas or positions are broken, and identitary boundaries turn more fluid. Pope Francis as author of *Laudato Si* makes a prime example; but also the conservative standard-bearer M. Miegel insofar adopting a growth-critical position, provoking an intra-elite discursive rupture (Brand, 2012a). The Austrian Life Ministry launching a *Growth in Transition* initiative as a multi-stakeholder dialogue endows growth-critical debates with public character, thus blurring any identity markers.

Furthermore, there could be access barriers (material, discursive, identitary) to certain publics – thus there is also a question about the porosity of the above boundaries. Problems of access (as well as of identity- and discursive-bridging) are often bridged through insider-outsider networks: discursive and identity carriers that have access-clearance to move across boundaries, thus generating symbolic communicating vessels and discursive contaminations (Parks & Roberts, 2010). Both case studies showcase the importance of transversal institutional platforms allowing brokerage among discursive worlds as a key for spurring innovation (Fairclough, 1992) and counterweight discursive imbalances. In BV we observe the mutual contamination of class discourses with ethnical and ecological ones; as well as with a wholesale critique of the capitalist mode of accumulation (Altmann, 2013c, p. 67); and GT offers a display of micro- and meso-level crossover platforms among NGOs, SMOs, scholarly

academic and non-academic sphere, trade unions, religious organizations, technical state-agencies, etc. (see Chapter 4).

The profusion of cross-over platforms also provides for the *peninsular* (rather than *insular*) character of GT (WBGU, 2014, p. 74). 'Peninsular' agents play the role of the Simmelian *stranger*, rather than that of the *outsider* – i.e. they are involved in society, but maintain a constitutive distance from it. Hence, while both BV and GT serve as clustering platforms for a large array of counter-cultural or counter-hegemonic identity-groups, many of the 'transformative agents' on the stage purposefully distance themselves from the image of revolutionary agitators or naïve dreamers to avoid getting attached a punishing image as social outcasts.

In GT, P2P-advocates, growth-critical reformists, and advocates of a new social contract or a solidarity-based modernity (see Chapter 3); or – in the BV debate – discursive exponents of, e.g. the primordial (C. Viteri, J. Medina) or postdevelopmental (e.g. A. Escobar; A. Acosta; P. Dávalos; E. Gudynas) variants (see Chapter 5) are embedded in established institutional contexts (as clearly exemplified by the broad scholarly support-network of BV[229]). In some cases, they represent prestigious organizations: Uwe Schneidewind as head of the Wuppertal Institute and newly appointed member of the WBGU, Primin Spiegel as head of *Misereor*, or Angelika Zahrnt as former chair of the biggest German environmental NGO, BUND; or Carlos Viteri as editor of one of the main newspapers in Quito, *El Hoy*; or even play leading roles in official arrangements (Tim Jackson as Economics Commissioner on the UK Sustainable Development Commission, Alberto Acosta as president of the Ecuadorean Constitutional Assembly and later minister of Correa's Cabinet).

Even if the data did not highlight this aspect, it becomes apparent from mere observation in the field that shared lifeworlds (e.g. a liberal worldview) or habitus (dressing code, body language, culinary taste, clues of appropriate behavior) between TD-performers and their audiences in mainstream culture play a role in building communicating vessels between often divergent discursive worlds (Lenger, Schneickert, & Schumacher, 2013). The esthetic layout of websites, organizational logos, report covers, feuilletons, conference venues and meals, etc. – especially in GT – match the patterns of recognizability of mainstream culture and, more often than not, of its elites, thus conveying a univocal message: 'we are no social outcasts', while, at the same time, manage to remain attractive and connect to the grassroots, as was clearly shown in the 2014 International Degrowth Conference in Leipzig.

[229] For an in-depth exploration of this field from a quantitative and qualitative perspective, see Vanhulst & Zaccai (2016)

The lesson is clear: actors inhabiting multiple identitary worlds and thus capable of bonding with a larger variety of publics will enjoy of greater transformative leverage.

Here again, through the abovementioned mechanisms of 'unusual suspects' and 'unconventional roles', subversive messages and symbolic contents irrupt into the 'comfort zone' of targeted publics. Hence, say, regular readers of *The Guardian* or of papal encyclicals become exposed to a different, destabilizing discourse, which, however, appears acceptable by virtue of the authoritative character attributed to the source.

The above stated similarities notwithstanding, however, it is arguably in terms of articulation mechanisms of diverse publics where we find the greatest contrast between the GT and BV debates, as manifest in the differential logics of 'horizontal' versus 'vertical' discursive articulation discussed in section 6.1.

Synthesis: typifying enablers

The work of condensation and abstraction performed above distilled common enablers, illustrating and specifying differential nuances for each of the empirical cases reviewed. To close the first part of the chapter, these enablers are here presented in a synthetic overview, further structured in three categories which allow for distinctions (to be addressed in the second part of the chapter) regarding the variable degree of control of agents over the identified enablers or the possibility to eventually substitute them with a purpose-tailored functional equivalent: *structural enablers* are not independent variables in the short term, but some of them, in principle and to an extent, could be deliberately (re)produced by the relevant agents. Worth noting is that the term 'structural' here, by virtue of the research design, denotes meso-level structures mediating collective learning processes in a destabilizing macro-level context (risk society and geostorical governance challenges). *Situational* or *contingent enablers,* by contrast, are defined on a time-axis. They are typically harnessed by agents, rather than conjured at will. Lastly, under the header *agential enablers* I listed the systematized practices retrieved from the case studies, from both levels of discourse analysis (representation and practice).

Insofar this research design is inscribed in the interpretative paradigm of the social sciences, the presented enablers are not to be understood as necessary (let alone sufficient) conditions for transformative CLPs to arise, but rather as focal points that facilitate the understanding of such processes in the empirical cases at hand, whose level of generalizability has been raised as a result of bringing two very dissimilar cases into resonance with each other.

Structural enablers

- Repository of exteriority or alterity vis-à-vis mainstream culture (sub-cultures or large networks), featuring an existent and available context of practice that creates structural conditions for alternative patterns of subjectivation and identitary ascription.
- Points of cultural/ identitary anchorage in mainstream culture ('history', 'invented tradition', established cultural or political discourses) enabling bridging between the above *locus* of alterity and the 'mainland', that is, turning metaphorically so-called here 'islands' into 'peninsulas'.
- Transformation-supportive framework conditions: institutional and juridical framework setting (funding, licensing, etc.), including:
    - (Intra-)institutional diversity fulfilling the double role of a) lowering conformity pressures vis-à-vis centralized political and economic powers, and b) preserving cultural and political agonism.
    - Relatively strong separation of material power from power of symbolic production, distribution, and interpretation (e.g. through decentralized, resilient, independent funding structures and, in hierarchical structures, a relative autonomy of support bases from their politically representative cusp)
    - Interdependent agent configurations for balanced power-structures.
    - High capillarity infrastructure of communication for bottom-up institutionalization and pattern-diffusion independent from those controlled by material powers and mainstream culture.

Situational enablers

- Acute (perceived) crisis as destabilizer of the prevalent symbolic order and trigger for learning.
- Cultural and/or (sub-)political 'transformative momentum'
- Social legitimacy of the actors performing TDs
- Synchronic build-up of inter-textual framework for cross-referencing and convergent activities in various relevant societal arenas or sub-systems.
- Availability of (a) narrative(s) combining system-critique ('push') with an alternative vision of the good life ('pull')

- Credible prospect of fundamental alteration in the material base of society, be it a dystopian narrative such as Industry 4.0 or the 'end of work', or utopian ones such as the "collaborative commons" or a broad socio-political movement for transformative change.
- State or other agents controlling large communicative infrastructures willing to play the role of transformative discursive agents.

Agential enablers

Our analytical focus being on agency, observation yielded a complex array of agential enablers. Roles are condensed here into six categories: Meaning-making, infrastructure provision, leadership/ pioneering/energizing, brokerage/bridging, strategizing/acupuncturist, and legitimacy-transfer. The typical practices distilled from empirical analysis are clustered under these six headers.

a. *Meaning-making* activities (discourse production, dissemination, hermeneutics), including:

- disrupting the unsustainable status quo (through coupled problematization of social injustices and social pathologies).
- fostering a renewed sense of shared prosperity beyond mainstream SD, co-producing new shared horizons of possibility and expectation.
- Communication: symbolic distribution through circulation of discourses/knowledge.
- Providing orientation for the symbolic interpretation of concrete situations.

b. *Infrastructure provision*:

- Shaping institutional and normative framework conditions.
- Diversity mainstreaming: Building discursive diversification into the institutional and material structure providing for epistemic or "cognitive justice" (Santos) and discursive innovation.
- Synchronic build-up of a framework of symbolic *dispositifs* for mutual reference.
- New communication forms and media: Design and implementation of deliberation, communication, and information formats to stimulate transformation discourses.

c. *Leadership/ pioneering/ energizing*:

- Mobilization and organization of material and ideational forces.

- Catalyzing policy and cultural initiatives and practices connecting with (and shaping) the larger public sphere and mainstream political debate (e.g. 'non-reformist reforms': Yasuní, UBI, work reduction).
- Clustering platforms (e.g. CONAIE, Degrowth, Transition Towns).
- Amplifying, generating multiplier-effect.
- Creation, protection, and targeted support to breeding grounds for TD-utopias.

d. Brokerage / bridging

- Creating meaningful connections among clusters at various scales and scopes (generations, political ideologies, SM struggles, political elites and constituencies, policy-fields) to form more encompassing networks and transformative learning cycles, helping circumvent the barriers of parochial cognitive codes.
- Discursive brokerage, including:
    - foster discursive re-combinations and re-significations through meaning-making activities (e.g. drawing on 'surplus meaning' of established values or on shared frames).
    - translating socio-cognitive codes.
- Identity brokerage, including:
    - blurring identity markers conveying social status from transformative proposals, thus channeling interaction towards substantial discussions.
    - contaminations through symbolic communicative vessels (e.g. insider-outsider networks, TD-advocacy by 'unusual suspects' or actors playing an unconventional role).
- Provoking rupture in intra-elite discourse through revulsive insiders (e.g. conservative growth-critique).
- Making interdependencies and common vulnerabilities apparent through facilitation of dialogue and conflict mediation.
- Catalytic initiatives narrowing down debate to relevant aspects for the concrete proposal at hand.

e. *Cultural and political strategizing:* borrowing from Narberhaus & Sheppard's (2015), the role-label *"acupuncturist"* seems eloquent to synthesize this role in visual-metaphorical fashion, as

consisting in identifying and activating leverage points with maximum systemic ripple-effects. Activities include:

- Identifying and harnessing historical windows of opportunity (acute emergent crises, breakdown of existent coping mechanisms).
- System-analysis, identification of central arenas of intervention and key leverage points ('fights worth fighting')
- Strategic synchronizing.
- Articulating complementarities and harnessing synergies to build discourse coalitions.
- Strategic communication (*backcasting*, strategic framing, etc.)

f. *Symbolic legitimation:* involving also strategic practices aimed at endowing TDs with entity, visibility, and legitimacy through authority (e.g. through science, state sponsorship, democratization) and/or credibility, for example by harnessing credible prospects of fundamental change in the foreseeable future.

Since the focus of this research is on transformative agency, that is, on how can transformative learning be deliberately fostered, the question arises: in how far can the above synthesized enablers be deliberately established, with relative independence from macro-societal constraints?

Needless to say, there is no conclusive answer to this question, broadly formulated. Yet transformative agency, as defined here, is set out to *transform rather than merely adapt to constraining structures*. Hence let us briefly consider the room for maneuver available for transformative agents, in principle, to provide for the above structural and contingent conditions.

There is no indication in our case studies that the trigger-function of an 'acute crisis' can be substituted by a deliberate agency performance, although there is no reason to rule it out, in principle. The perception of a contingent disruption as 'systemic' (i.e. as disruptive of the prevailing symbolic order), however, is clearly dependent upon purposeful narrative mediation, as comes out clearly from the data. The same is true for the prospection of a credible alternative to the current order.

Transformative momentum can be fostered through creating 'futuring literacy' *(Kultur der Zukunftsfähigkeit)* (Haderlapp and Trattnig 2013, cited in Reisch & Bietz, 2014, p. 29) or 'transformative literacy' (Schneidewind, 2013a), "an 'atmosphere for transformation' in which innovative laboratories can develop particularly well" (WBGU, 2014, p. 95). A mainstreaming of a SET-perspective into the

formal educational system would fit the purpose (WBGU, 2011, p. 22), stressing knowledge about geostorical challenges and about existing discourses regarding how to deal with them, and fostering deliberation, as well as holistic, global, and systemic thinking. "Civic wealth" and strong civic institutions (Bauwens, 2012b, p. 7) channeling transformative impulse can surely also be culturally and politically fostered.

Material capacity and infrastructure-provision are, of course, partly dependent and partly independent variables. However, purpose-suited coalition-building and institutional design are tools through which transformative agents can pursue the goals of shielding transformative agents from social pressures, cultural and political leverage, and discursive (i.e. knowledge/power) balance: Discursive diversity can be mainstreamed into institutional design, as well as complexity- and long-term orientation; transversal platforms (cross-sectoral, cross-disciplinary, trans-geographical) creating structural discursive instability and exogamic discursive dynamics can be established through the initiative of agents.

Regarding identitary anchorage points, both case studies show a decisive agential element at play: BV draws on an "invented tradition" (J. C. Alexander, 2004, p. 530) – with the deliberate coining of tailored terminology such as *sumak kawsay* or *suma quamaña*; and in GT we observed the networked emergence of larger platforms nurturing alternative sub-cultures, such as Transition Towns, the commons- or degrowth-movements, which work as spheres of alternative subjectivation vis-à-vis mainstream culture. They also perform the role of epistemic balancing by counterweighting the institutionalist and rational choice approaches dominant in the mainstream sustainability debate with post-developmentalist, postcolonial, or feminist ones (Brand, Omann, et al., 2013), and leading to accelerated discursive and strategic innovation (Altmann, 2013a, p. 29). Both cases also feature purposeful acts of legitimacy-transfer by the state, science, or 'unusual suspects' playing the role of Simmelian *strangers*, which blurs identity markers and advances a multiple and diverse anchorage of the debates.

Last but not least, the role of influential, creative individuals in creating momentum and structural conditions for TD-driven learning cannot be overstated (Altmann, 2013c, p. 67; Grießhammer & Brohmann, 2015, p. 18). The structural leverage of individuals is manifest, for example, with Marlon Santi mainstreaming BV into the political agenda of CONAIE (which he had co-developed as earlier president of the indigenous organizations at Sarayaku); or with Alberto Acosta in his double capacity as an academic discursive spearhead for BV and as a cabinet member of the Ecuadorean government and president of the Montecristi Constituent Assembly.

By way of conclusion, then, as per the insights gained from our empirical analysis, transformative agency does retain significant room for maneuver, regardless of prevalent structural conditions. This does not amount to saying that transformative agents are not constrained by these structures. The issue of securing integral, lasting, and coherent framework conditions favorable to transformative learning is a complex issue directly pertaining the implications for governance, which will be discussed at some length in Chapter 7.

6.4. Modelling 'transformative agency'

Having reviewed structural, situational, and agential enablers – understood as conditions or actions, in the latter case, i.e. the *what* providing for the emergence of transformative learning. The present section, in turn, focuses on the *who* of these learning processes, seeking to model the concept of transformative agency in a twofold manner: first, by distinguishing *types of agency* according to how they deal with the dilemmas of the 'conflicted agent' and the 'missing agent' (or deficit of enactable agency) outlined in Chapter 2. Thus, the concepts of 'subrogatory agency' and of 'hybrid agency' are worked out and defined. And secondly, by portraying an ideal model of *typical agent-configurations* and their dynamic elements (*typical agency roles* and their corresponding enabling practices); that is, by connecting the typical 'who' to the typical 'what' of transformative agency.

On a methodological note, insofar agency features at the levels of both discursive representation and practice, the two transversal dimensions of discourse analysis come here into dialectic merger to yield an integrated picture of the findings. Although our main focus has hitherto been mainly on the description of observed practices, the description of normative representations is equally important because they provide a clearer, more systematic and coherent picture of what transformative agency is (or should be) like. Beyond the obvious gap between the idea and actually observable features of transformative agency, no contradiction arises between the two, insofar both come from data coded to support the theoretically underpinned hypothesis of a transformative agency at play both in BV and in the GT debate, as elaborated in Part I. And because the goal of this research is to develop both empirical and theoretical insights into the roles and practices of such 'transformative agency' advancing collective learning towards a SET, the clarity and coherence of representations are key to complement the fragmentary and incomplete picture that the observation of empirical practice offers – particularly as the object of our analysis is largely situated in the realm of non-existence (absences and emergences).

6.4.1. Circumventing the predicament of transformative agency: subrogatory agency and hybrid agency

Our empirical inquiry has indeed yielded rich insights as to how the twin dilemma of the 'conflicted agent' and the 'missing agent' can be addressed and are de facto dealt with in practice, that is, if not resolved or circumvented, at least successfully mitigated.

How is the predicament of the 'conflicted agent' addressed in our case studies? While the 'transformative agent' cannot escape the circular dynamics of the (hetero)subjection process which creates an identitary bond between the subject and the world he or she aims at changing, it is not less true that, as already Alberto Melucci's (1989) pioneering studies showed, contemporary social movements are not only conceived as means towards an end, but rather an end in themselves: by channeling their participants' social needs, social movements themselves become *loci* of identitary construction with the potential to 'contain' (partially, at least) the circle of hetero-subjection. This becomes particularly apparent in the case of so-called "systemic activism" or "transition activism" (Escobar, 2012b, 2015), whose participants view themselves as *change agents* and variably define their identity in opposition to the 'system', i.e. to the world they seek to fundamentally change.

A parallel can be drawn between both BV and GT, in the sense that both emerged from the breeding ground of a sub-set of non-hegemonic social relations, which offers alternative patterns of subjectivation and identity ascription. The case of BV merits probably even more special consideration: The sheer extension and effects of social movement activism in Latin America is such that it prompted Raul Zibechi to redefine the cultural and political role of conventional social movements, re-conceptualizing them, instead, as "societies in movement"(Zibechi & Nuin, 2008). In the GT debate, we identified the role of network structures as enablers allowing for different patterns of identity formation (yielding more open, hybrid, and de-localized identities) as compared to conventional social structures (Castells, 2000).

Furthermore, institutionally secured communicating vessels with mainstream cultural and political debate as key to preserving 'transition activists' from being labeled as outliers. This 'peninsular' (as opposed to 'insular') character of sub-cultural groups or networks is often even associated with an elite-habitus, with their representatives enjoying social recognition and amassing high cultural capital. This is achieved through the proliferation of cross-over platforms and coalitions fostering interculturality and epistemic empathy or 'multilingualism' (Santos, 2004). Mainstreaming of cultural

and political diversity into institutional design, with inter- and intra-institutional discursive counterweights, or "anti-power" drivers (Holloway, 2002). Purposeful legitimacy-transfers from authoritative or prestigious institutions (state, science), organizations, or individuals to transformative initiatives and their advocates or promoters, in the mode of positive discrimination (e.g. right to sufficiency), constitute another identitary damage-control mechanism supporting transformative agents.

Many of the above mechanisms are also effective against the predicament of the 'missing agent'. Yet there are also mechanisms and structures more finely tailored to address what we called the 'triple deficit of enactable agency' which are worthwhile describing here.

The 'incapable agent', who by his or her condition of cultural and political marginality is impeded from exerting influence in societal matters, is served by the resilient (i.e. non-dependent on the short-term ups and downs of politics & business) institutional and organizational infrastructures providing cultural, political, and economic shielding to agents, and increasing their cultural and/or political leverage. Furthermore, through strategic "acupuncturist" interventions, whatever resources available can be concentrated in the 'fights worth fighting', thus maximizing their transformative impact. These constitute effective means of empowering incapable agents, or else those representing them on the public stage.

Then there is the two missing types of agents whose agency is inevitably subrogated by someone else: first, the '*absent agent*': de-localized 'others' which have a stake in the prospect of a SET, but whose *Missachtungen* at the losing end of the "imperial ways of life" in the global North are culturally non-grievable (Butler, 2010) and politically unrepresented; and, secondly, the *indeterminate agent*, who is either unborn or unidentifiable.

Mediation mechanisms seem less developed in the face of these two cases. Since the connections in global entanglements are anything but self-evident, and depend on the discursive elaboration of complex causation mechanisms, cognitive persuasion (let alone emotional involvement) is difficult to elicit. Same is true for future generations or those affected by the diffuse impacts of, say, climate change.

Pathways towards a more effective mediation are visible, however, in the fostering of relational cultures of solidarity, holism, and biocentrism; as well as 'futuring' and 'transformative literacy', and systemic activism. To create discursive corridors for the aforesaid, a structural rebalancing is required in the power of symbolic production, distribution, interpretation (e.g. through stricter separation from material power), as well as new forms of political and cultural communication and operation (e.g.

backcasting, 'futurization of politics'), high-capillarity communication infrastructure at the service of TDs, and the democratization of science.

The strength and pervasiveness of what we have called *subrogatory agency* – the defense of the interests of a (generalized) other – can be expected to directly covariate with the systematicity of such cultural changes. Decisive would be the establishment of institutionalized "commitment devices" (A. Offer) through empowered agents (chiefly, the state): same as marriage, savings accounts, or the state itself have developed as mechanisms providing for social stability, "commitment devices" tailored to suit geostorical challenges are urgently called for, but such demand has hitherto clashed against the indolence of the "conflicted state" (T. Jackson). Examples are the case of Yasuní-ITT in the BV debate, but also much overdue but ever postponed policy-measures such as those of a "carbon cap" or the still far-lying energy transition to renewables.

In between of what we have called 'enactable agency' and 'subrogatory agency', however, the study of BV revealed a further variant which could be understood as a form of *hybrid agency*, a middle-ground between the other two, and therefore maybe also more promissory in terms of its potential of empirical translation than the purely subrogatory form.

This hybrid form of agency emerges from processes of inter-cultural dialogue or *"diálogos de saberes"* (Leff, 2010; Santos, 2009) with non-modern cosmogonies or epistemes – what we above called 'exogenous learning'. As an empirical phenomenon, *Buen vivir* exhibits a politically effective articulation – though by no means free of tensions, contradictions, and co-optations, as we saw – between recognition struggles *à la Honneth* and the extension of phenomenological horizons through epistemic inputs exogenous to Western modernity (Adrian E. Beling et al., 2014; Adrian E. Beling & Vanhulst, 2016a; Vanhulst & Beling, 2014a). In such altered meaning-structures, the anthropogenic degradation of the planet – rather than only its undesirable consequences – tend to be experienced as a *direct and immediate Missachtung*. Indeed, for the holistic and relational ethos of *Buen vivir*, the current ecological crisis represents an assault on Mother Earth or *Pachamama*, and, with it, not only to the biophysical preconditions of existence of humans and other living beings, but also to the ontological preconditions for their constitution as subjects: "when a tree is cut, it is like our identity were being cut" [230].

[230]Source: http://elpais.com/elpais/2017/06/20/planeta_futuro/1497940076_174344.html?id_externo_rsoc=FB_CC

While this dynamic can still not escape the circle of hetero-subjection, it does fundamentally de-center the framework within which this circle is defined: the (ideal-typical) holistic-relational subject of *Buen vivir* does not stand as a representative of a missing third party in the struggle for, say, the recognition of 'rights of nature'; rather, in a certain sense, he or she stands as a *representative of him or herself* as a victim of social *Misachtung*. Under these new assumptions, i.e. a collective of individuals capable of experimenting the global ecological crisis as a direct and immediate moral injury, as an attack on his or her own holistic-relational identity, the conceptual figures of a *subrogatory* and a *hybrid* agency would reinstate (to a certain degree) the validity of the assumptions of classical theories of agency-led social change discussed in Chapter 2. To be sure, the mediated and time-lagged experience of *Missachtung* cannot be expected to be as powerful as an immediate, present experience. But however imperfectly, grievance-driven transformative action without direct experience of *Missachtung* appears possible under the above structural conditions, and to the degree that these are developed.

6.4.2. Typical agent configurations, roles and practices towards enhanced transformative potential

As became apparent across our inquiry, agent-network arrangements are complex, diverse, variable in the scope of their purpose, degree of institutionalization, and duration. Adopting a classical institutional categorization of social actors, and drawing a free analogy with the "triple helix" model proposed by Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (2000) to explain the dynamics of innovation, the structural agent-configurations at work in the case studies can be synthesized in two basic types:

The configuration emerging from the case of BV could be described as a particular "Latin-American triple helix" constituted by social movements (with prominence of indigenous movement organizations), the academic sphere, and the state (Vanhulst & Beling, 2014a). This helix is 'powered' or activated through the *inside-outward* (tide of anti-neoliberalism materializing in the "left turn") and *outside-inward* flows (development critique, global environmental predicament coming from foreign development and environmental organizations) described in Chapter 5, with the common axis of rotation around the conceptual banner of *Buen vivir*. The interaction (deliberation, negotiations, contestations) among individual and organizational partners networked at institutional level generates an 'ideational overlay' that progressively contaminates the underlying ideational and material arrangements, with a reorganizing effect (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000), as becomes apparent in the evolution of the discourse visually synthesized in Figure 12 (see Chapter 5). The ideational overlay

and its institutional counterpart (e.g. Rights of Nature) can be considered as the retention mechanism of a *learning* network.

Contrasting with this triadic structure at play in BV, the GT debate features a dyadic structure or "double helix" formed by the scholarly and the civil society spheres (with a prominent role of NGOs, though progressively incorporating social movements and niches of alternative practice) networked at individual, organizational, and institutional level in ad hoc cross-over platforms such as *Konzeptwerk neue Ökonomie*, *Wachstumswende*, or the Civil Society Platform for the Research Transiton (*Forschungswende*), where sub-political discussions take place. Formal institutional platforms at the state level have also played a prominent role (Enquete-WWL; Austrian WiW initiative), but the state plays here a rather passive role as an *agora* for deliberation, rather than as active contributor to the debate. This 'double helix' is powered through the historical convergence of the Great Recession and the growing public impingement of global environmental changes since the mid-2000, and the ensuing debate revolving around the floating signifier of a "Great Transformation".

Furthermore, the case studies have allowed worthwhile insights into the distinctive dynamics of these configurations, which reside in the groundbreaking roles performed by their agents, thus shedding light on the respective strengths and weaknesses of both these configurations in terms of transformative agency. In the following a characterization of these roles and practices is outlined.

The scholarly sphere – especially individual scholars and organizations aligning with the agenda of a 'transformative science' in GT, and the various scholarly currents (postdevelopmentalist, indigenist, decolonialist) facilitating discursive crossovers among contesting variants of BV – has proven pivotal to fostering TD-driven learning in a number of ways[231]. For one thing, and perhaps most evidently, scholars ranging from the fields of social sciences and the humanities to the biophysical sciences have provided substantial discursive inputs to the debates, be it by questioning the status quo with concepts like 'imperial ways of life', 'Great Acceleration', or 'degrowth', or by creating new narratives and blueprint strategies articulating a systemic perspective. This is valid for both the BV and GT debates (Biermann, 2011b; Grießhammer & Brohmann, 2015; Hackmann & St. Claire, 2012; Narberhaus &

[231] This may appear as a paradoxical remedy, insofar the acceleration of scientific knowledge and technology over the last few hundred years is one of the main factors currently leading the biosphere to the danger of collapse (Parra & Walsh, 2016). However, this is less attributable to science itself than to the global empowerment of a particular scientific culture which is functional to the reproduction of the status quo (Beck, 1992; Gibson-Graham, 2008; Paulson, 2017), which is being counter-weighted by the opening of the epistemological canon, as illustrated by the scholarly engagements reviewed in our case studies.

Sheppard, 2015). In addition, however, with Goldfarb (2000), scholars can be seen as fulfilling a necessary role as democratic agents in a contemporary context of structural democratic deficit, "at one time civilizing political contestation and subverting complacent consensus". Goldfarb portrays intellectuals as a special type of Simmelian *strangers*, who are primarily concerned with the cultivation of their critical faculties, which makes them singularly well-suited to address urgent contemporary issues such as *geostorical* challenges. In this light, intellectuals concentrate the enabling agential roles described above under the labels of 'legitimizing', 'meaning-making', 'broking/bridging', 'acupuncturist', and 'leadership'. Scholars thus adopt both and indirect role (supply of overarching concepts, theories, and strategies) as well as direct action intervening as promoters, facilitators, and critical feedback-givers regarding transformative initiatives (Brand, 2016b; Grießhammer & Brohmann, 2015; Paulson, 2017).

In the activist sphere, in turn, we observe both a growing call for (Narberhaus, 2013; Raskin, 2010; WBGU, 2014) and arguably also the actual emergence of a new type of 'systemic activism', which jointly problematizes issues of social injustice with social pathologies (understood as being at the root of observed injustices). Examples of emergent "systemic movements" in the global North are the Commons movement, the Degrowth movement, the P2P movement, the Environmental Justice movement, or else the intersectional feminist movement (Narberhaus & Sheppard, 2015), while in the global South prominent examples come from historically marginalized social groups, including the indigenous movement and peasant movements such as *La Via Campesina*.

The 'systemic' character of this emerging form of activism can be seen, for example, in the growing convergence of diverse social and ecological emancipatory struggles (Kühne, 2013, p. 84). Furthermore, international NGOs, think tanks and scientific advisory bodies "can operate as lawyers or stewards of global commons" and take up a mobilizing role, breaking deadlocks and creating scope for action (WBGU, 2014, pp. 4; 72). Activists "can put a spoke in the wheels of the ideology of escalation […] create public pressure for a complete re-think, and push through alternative solutions to problems […] They can help to transform a resigned sense that 'there is no alternative' into an inspiring belief that 'another world is possible'". (Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014, p. 141). Hence in spite of persistent hindrances (issue-silos, short-termism, funding-conditioned bias towards immediate and measurable results, etc.), civil society thus seems to be incipiently discovering its potential for 'orchestrating' and rallying societal forces towards a wholesale social-ecological transformation. (Kriegman, 2008; Narberhaus, 2012; WBGU, 2014).

In addition, as per lessons gained from both the practice and the representations at play in both case studies, social movement organizations and NGOs are also experimenting with a rather novel, more proactive socio-political role beyond the usual *rule-challenging* (protest) or *rule-taking* (service provision) roles, towards a (sub)political *rule-making* role. This includes meaning-making, framing, and setting the tone and topics of socio-political debate (e.g. Oxfam boosting inequality into public debate, the indigenous movements' transforming the liberal state into a plurinational state in Bolivia, or the growth-critical agenda-setting voices in the Enquete-WWL and in the Austrian WiW), co-shaping of programmatic agendas (Oil moratorium in Ecuador, Yasuní-ITT, constitutional debates in the Andean countries, long-term research orientation at *Forschungswende*), or empowering political actors (e.g. indigenous movement in Ecuador and Bolivia), etc.

Last but not least, worthwhile insights could be gained from the case studies regarding the role of the state in advancing collective learning processes towards a SET. In transversal perspective, the state can be identified as playing diverse roles, both as institutional agent and as political *agora*, as well as a range of conventional and unconventional roles: Conventional institutional roles featuring in the GT and BV debates are those of the state as a regulator, implementer, or investor (i.e. as an economic agent), which come to the fore in mainstream SD narratives where a 'green state' is deemed responsible for setting the right regulations and allocating fiscal resources to green infrastructure; but also in BV, where, at least in the phase of discursive assemblage, the state becomes the sole agent empowered to advance BV.

In its role as political *agora*, we find the state hosting rather unconventional debates (at least in current times of dominance of technocratic politics) dealing with fundamental transformations to the existing societal order, both in BV (constituent assemblies) and, less sharply, in GT (Enquete WWL or WiW in Austria). In the case of BV, also unusual is the constituency of these *agoras*, characterized by the unprecedented irruption of historically marginalized population groups as key actors in the political scene. The experiment was anything but trivial: the case of BV has disproven conservative arguments warning about diversity in politics as leading to ungovernability. Both in Ecuador and in Bolivia, it rather led to the consolidation of the indigenous voice in national and local politics. (Altmann, 2015b, p. 29)

Particularly remarkable in the context of our inquiry, however, are two further roles of the state: Again in BV, and equally unprecedented, we find an "escalation of the state's remit from merely making environmental policy to taking on the preservation of nature as a whole" (Arsel & Avila Angel, 2012,

p. 221). Hence the state here takes up the role of a TD-agent itself, changing horizons of expectation about the state's mandate regarding the advancement of a SET. This symbolic performativity arguably overcompensates, in terms of collective learning, the flagrant shortcomings of the state in terms of effectively implementing this mandate.

Yet the most important institutional role the state plays in both BV and GT, I argue, is not an unusual but certainly an often overlooked role of the state, which was stressed in the first part of this chapter: it is the role of endowing TDs with public entity (in this sense, the state really 'creates' BV) and backing them up (as the WiW initiative of the Austrian 'Life Ministry'). This produces three key effects with learning-implications: a) an *amplifying* effect (making TDs visible), b) a *framing* effect (establishing interpretative keys, notwithstanding possible contestations), and c) a *legitimation* effect. In BV, this is self-evident, but also in GT we find a pro-active state fostering (though in impressionistic rather than systematic fashion) discursive innovation and agonism through technical, politically-shielded agencies, which transfer the state's legitimacy but not political conformity-pressures.

Regarding the first mentioned roles (regulator, implementer, investor), the BV case showcases the inherent limitations of state-channeled utopian politics when material-structural matrixes are not transformed (Becker, 2011; Adrian E. Beling et al., 2018), as indicated by the divorce between the governments of Ecuador and Bolivia and the social movements that had helped them reach the empowered space, by the reinforcement of the neo-extractivist matrix coexisting with an increasingly merely rhetorical and watered-down version of the statist BV. The fading of 'Green New Deal' narratives from the GT debate, in turn, shows that the capacity of the state to steer towards a 'Green modernity' through its role as regulator, implementer, and investor has hitherto proven just as elusive as a the biocentric order of BV. Both cases ratify the Tim Jackson's hypothesis of the "conflicted state" trapped in a dilemma between short-term socio-economic stability and long term ecological sustainability. The more modest functions of generating, naming, illuminating, disseminating, connecting, and multiplying BV-agents, and endowing them with public legitimacy, however, seems critical to the purposes of unleashing what can arguably be regarded as the world's first macro-scale collective learning experiment aimed at a social-ecological transformation.

The answer to the dilemma of the conflicted state may thus lay in refining both the our conceptions about the functions of the state and the standards of 'failure' and 'success' when it comes to advancing transformative collective learning (Arsel & Avila Angel, 2012, pp. 221–222). In the case studies and in the literature, this shift in the role of the state is variously conceptualized as an "activating state" (Lessenich, 2008), a "shaping state" (gestaltender Staat; von Jorck, 2013b, p. 40; WBGU, 2011, 2014),

a "partner state" (Bauwens, 2012b), or a "meta-governance agent" (Grießhammer & Brohmann, 2015). A detailed consideration of these concepts and their implication in the praxis of (sustainability) governance is provided in Chapter 7.

6.5. Conclusions

BV and GT offer two different paths for the advancement of TDs in the context of *geostorical* governance challenges. Each feature a different relative weight of agents advancing transformative learning, as well as differential (though partially overlapping) roles.

At the level of representations, both converge in challenging to the modern liberal-capitalist *episteme*, which is framed either in antagonistic fashion or, less confrontative, from a position of alterity. At the level of discursive practice, common characteristics are multi-dimensional transversality, interconnected yet highly distributed agency acting synchronically, and a certain degree of institutionalization of discursive struggle. Key is also the role of "meaning-making elites" systemically linking critical debates to the goal of a SET (Aparicio Wilhelmi, 2013; Institut Solidarische Moderne, 2011; Reisch & Bietz, 2014, p. 42). The result is a situation of political and cultural agonism, including a creative tension between system-change and reformism, as we saw, for example, with the case of social-liberal reformist growth-critics in the GT debate (sufficiency-oriented reformism), or with the *primordial* and *hybrid* versions of BV.

Emergence can thus be seen as a function of combining a 'critical yeast' (meaning-making elites) with distributed and synchronized agency (aggregated vertically, as in BV, or pollinized horizontally, as in GT). Noteworthily, the concept of "meaning-making elites" (cf. Chapter 4) challenges the conventional distinctions between *top-down* and *bottom-up*, or else *inside-out* and *outside-in*. Insofar their elite-character resides in their power of symbolic production, distribution, and interpretation (rather than in their political or economic leverage), their agency (under favorable conditions) can be distributed across the societal structure, as we saw with the configurations of the 'double' and 'triple' helixes. Their performativity of meaning-making elites, as observed in our case studies, is a form of diffusionism triggering the emergence of collective learning processes.

Now from the perspective of the promoters of learning processes, who are the meaning-making agents concentrating the transformative impulse in our outlined configurations? The gravitational center of transformative learning, it appears, is to be located in civil society, in multifaceted interfaces with other actors (intellectuals; state; pioneering initiatives in societal niches). Indeed, transformative learning as

concrete actor-driven change process "is at present a phenomenon deeply anchored in the (self-)empowerment of the citizenry" (Reißig, 2014, p. 83) through, among other things, the new potentials unleashed by the ICT revolution (Bauwens, 2012b; Mason, 2015; Paech, 2012; Rifkin, 2014; Stengel, 2016), which opens a window of possibility for politically paralyzed "consumerist democracies" to become vibrant "prosumer democracies". At present, old and new forms of intervention conceived, mobilized, and organized from communal, regional, and supra-regional civil society initiatives (as well as virtually networked, de-localized agents) are walking this path towards a social-ecological transformation, including NGOs, critical intellectuals and journalists, progressive business entrepreneurs, and sectors of the political-administrative system. Their influence on the material world of politics and economics, however, is filtered through structural material barriers, thus constraining both further learning and its translation into an actual social-ecological transformation. Yet the "perfect storm" of the current multiple crisis can be reasonably expected to opens up further windows of opportunity in the coming years and decades for learning and transformative processes to unfold (Reißig 2014, Raskin 2010, Gallopin et al.)

In order to unleash a massive wave of transformative learning effects at the macro-level, these experiments would need to be systematized to gain continuity and coherence, creating a meso-level of implementation that articulates meta-perspectives such as the Anthropocene with particular local transformation-experiments, such as Transition Towns. This would serve the twofold objective of aggregation and systematization of particular experiences and the diffusion of institutionalized standards. (Krügger, 2012; Ronzheimer, 2013)

The greatest cleavage observed between our two case studies is the *differential role of political mediation in learning*. Implications of the amalgamation of BV with the arena of politics (rather than the mere politization of the debate[232]) can be observed in at least two dimensions: First, the differential logics of discursive articulation discussed in Section 6.2: a vertical political articulation versus a horizontal sub-political and cultural articulation: The fact that in Ecuador and Bolivia a larger portion of the population adopts BV as a political banner leads to the debate being filtered through the logic of the political system, which necessarily implies a certain level of ideologization and polarization, and the stiffening that comes with them (Latouche, 2009; Monni & Pallottino, 2013). The GT debate, in turn,

[232] A conceptual digression is relevant here between politics, i.e. the political system as a sub-system in society with its own regulatory principles, and the political, which is the process of discursive contention characterizing the political bond (Mouffe, 2005)

lacks serious political momentum, but remains *ipso facto* preserved from the one-sided logic of politics, while continuing to spread 'transformative literacy'.

The second dimension pertains the discursive process and its effects on transformative learning. The interpretative key is the differential logics of discursive assemblage or – in Alexander's terms – of "dramaturgical fusion": As becomes apparent from comparing Figure 12 and Figure 13 in Chapters 4 and 5, respectively, the discursive processes of BV appears to be an inversion of that of the GT: Indeed, BV emerged out of the convergent opposition to the neoliberal and developmentalist discourses then dominant as a rather marginal anti-systemic discourse *(primordial BV)*, but reaches its heyday when channeled into the political system, resulting in a process of discursive assemblage through political consensus *(hybrid BV)*. The inherent weakness of this assemblage soon turned into dislocation, with postdevelopmentalist and indigenist strands disputing the state's exclusive appropriation of BV.

From a perspective of transformative learning, the pathway of political channeling carries a double risk of ambitious transformative projects becoming stuck into the "trap of mere politicking" (Latouche, 2009, p. 95), and of ambitions proposals diluting while simultaneously suffocating alternative political forces. A third risk is that of going into a spiral of destructive confrontation among contending discursive agents, especially when the imbalance of power among the contenders is significant.

By contrast, in the GT discourse we first observed a phase of incubation, with numerous ideational sources coming into dialogue under the common premise of "going beyond strategies that offer Anthropocene conditions as solutions" to the multiple crisis (Escobar, 2013, p. 3). The actual emergence of the GT as debate, however, was traced back to deliberations at the Enquete-WWL, where the cleavage between conservative political forces and the opposition became apparent, and the concept of a "social-ecological transformation" was agreed upon as a way of drawing boundaries between the opposition and the ruling parties. In other words, the emergence of GT did not happen through consensus-building, as was the case with BV, but through discursive dislocation. The following months and years, in turn, saw an intensive process of progressive integration or assemblage through processes of lateral coordination and agonism. The risk here is that the process dissolves by evaporation; or else that it creates an own resonance box isolated from the purview of larger society, and starts reproducing merely following a self-preservation logic (Thompson, 1984), similar to that of politics, thus self-defeating its transformative ambitions.

The differential role of politics and the dissimilar modes of discursive articulation in the two empirical cases can be better understood in the structural context of their respective *loci* of enunciation. Latin American societies have historically lacked an intermediate institutional layer connecting the state with individual citizens, leading to a rift between the political sphere and civil society (Avritzer, 2002). Indicators of such split are the prevalence of informal clientelist relations from the local or communal level, where middle-men provide for the everyday needs of people in the face of an often-absent state, or the cult of the figure of *caudillos* (strong political or military leaders), currently associated with the prominence of the presidential figure in political culture, on the one hand, and a highly confrontational civil society, on the other. In Western Europe, in turn, political culture has historically developed into strong institutionalist and deliberative traditions (Germans, in particular, pride themselves in their strong 'debating culture'), with a highly functionally differentiated institutional infrastructure, which structurally enables complex forms of interaction among agents, and a rather cooperative or conciliatory civil society. (Kaldor, 2003)

The discursive spatiotemporal embeddedness of TDs into their *locus* of enunciation, however, also have a 'biasing' effect over the discursive representations of the common goal of a global social-ecological transformation.

Indeed, as was shown, both GT and BV largely fail to acknowledge (or at least analytically factor in) the global entanglements of local contexts, turning contextual symbolic and material markers into 'blind spots' of their global inter-imbrications. The lowest common denominator between GT and BV is to be found in the systemic interconnections and interdependencies of the globalized capitalist economy, as well as social and cultural structures underpinning it.

Hence, from the perspective of the envisaged global SET, debates around BV and GT should be brought into convergence towards this common, systemic root of the issues both seek to address, re-framing them as two sides of the same coin (Acosta, 2014; Brand, 2015; Dietz, 2014; Escobar, 2015) and the possible ways to tackle them from such systemic perspective (Acosta & Brand, 2017). The concept of "imperial ways of life", for example, as well as those of post-extractivism, post-capitalism, post-development, as well as those predicating the ecological impacts of the Western cultural model (Anthropocene, Great Acceleration, global environmental justice or climate justice) point in this direction.

Taking into consideration the key situational and contextual markers of the discourses analysed in this chapter, some promising complementary features between BV and GT enriching their respective understandings of systemic interconnections would be, for example, amending BV's focus on the

centrality of particular identities and territory with GT's focus on global relationships and exchanges; the focus on production of the former with the focus on consumption of the latter, or else the focus on systemic interdependences (implicit in GT) with that on power and domination (prominent in BV). At the level of cultural values, the anti-utilitarian, celebrative ethos of BV resonates with the aspiration to freedom, and so do the (self-)sufficient, time-wealthy, and less individualistic lifestyles conveyed by GT. Mutual support and understanding of complex and interdependent feedback loops would thus potentially enhance the efficacy of the respective local struggles (on which both discourses draw their legitimacy and the support-base needed to expand their influence) significantly. (Adrian E. Beling et al., 2018)

By way of synthesis of the above: As per our case studies, collective learning processes driven by social-ecological utopias thus present various features deviating from the ones highlighted or preferred in the mainstream sustainable development discourse, in many respects:

First, in terms of the key promoting agent: instead of a starring role of the state as regulatory and economic actor (as in the Green New Deal, Green Economy, or the statist variant of BV), or of markets (as in the Green Growth or Ecological Modernization narratives), transformative learning processes are driven by agent configurations (or 'helixes') centered around civil society initiatives, platforms, and actors, with a prominent role of intellectuals, and a facilitating (rather than regulating, implementing, or economic) role of the state, or else of parts of the state-administrative apparatus.

Secondly, the above agents overflow the boundaries of the roles conventionally attributed to them: activism incipiently also plays an unconventional role as "rule-maker" in political life, rather than merely as "rule-challenger" (protest, resistance) or "rule-taker" (service-provision); and so do intellectuals, who primarily perform the role of democratic agents facilitating political and cultural agonism, that is, promoting both the de-fusion of the conventional sustainable development imaginary – which, despite a failed one, is still discursively dominant –, on the one hand, and the fusion of new social-ecological utopias of a good life within the biophysical limits of the planet, on the other.

Third and lastly, as situated discursive productions, we identified a number of symbolic and material 'biases' in GT and BV associated with their respective *loci* of enunciation, which add a further layer of complexity to the task of understanding and facilitating transformative learning processes.

What are the implications of these 'anomalies' for the theory and praxis of global sustainability governance?

This is the question leading our closing discussion and conceptualization work in Chapter 7.

CHAPTER 7

Re-conceptualizing agency and governance for a social-ecological transformation

The concept of governance itself stands in urgent need of renewal.
Tim Jackson, 2009

This last chapter seeks to explore and discuss the implications of our empirical findings for the practice of (global) sustainability governance.

The findings from our two empirical case studies summarized in Chapter 6 suggest some unsettling implications for the conventional, often-implicit assumptions of mainstream sustainable development and sustainability governance discourses. In terms of the *who* of sustainability governance, these unsettling character refer, firstly, to which actors are assigned the starring roles in driving sustainability learning processes: while the main characters in the plot of mainstream SD discourses are governments and business actors (with an increasingly important yet subsidiary role of NGOs), in our empirical case studies we found that the agent configurations at the forefront of transformative learning are the scientific and activist spheres, instead – though the state remains a foothold of these configurations.

With regard to the *what* of governance, we found that the roles of classical governance agents are substantially subverted in the observed discursive processes and representations: civil society appears as revulsive 'rule-maker', rather than merely as a protestor or a service-provider to the established order; and intellectuals feature as energizing and democratizing agents, rather than mere suppliers of 'neutral' knowledge-inputs to the political and corporate decision-making elites. The state, in turn, plays a crucial but rather indirect role, farther from conventional role-attributions such as rule-setting or intervening as investor, and rather focused in setting framework conditions fostering cultural change.

In addition, our cases showed that 'context matters', i.e. that the locus of discursive enunciation has direct implications on the way themes, emphases, framings, problem-structuration, and narratives come to structure transformation discourses. Paradoxically, however, the global perspective of a SET requires 'de-provincializing' TDs. This does not amount to dis-embedding TDs or erasing the markers of their situatedness, but rather framing them into a *glocal* perspective.

In this last chapter, I argue that for not only do the above features add complexity and set sustainability governance up to unsuspected challenges, but that they challenge the very concept of governance itself.

This challenge is suggested rather than demonstrated *tout court* by our empirical findings, since our methodological design does not support this kind of claims to generalizability. Yet our findings at the level of discursive representations, in triangulation with theoretical literature, strongly converge in the assessment of macro-level 'unsustainability lock-ins' which find no satisfactory answers within the conceptual framework in which governance is defined. Instead, they point at high-intensity transformative learning critically depending on a re-conceptualization of the logic of interventions aimed at fostering social change. Furthermore, they also offer a grounded (though sketchy) operational outlining of a new conceptual morphology for the stewardship of collective learning that differs from the logic of governance. This last chapter seeks to delineate the conceptual and theoretical contours of such morphology, which is framed as an alternative and simultaneously complementary approach to conventional governance, under the rubric of *para-governance*, and discuss its implications for an integral theory of social-ecological transformations based on the perspective of collective learning.

7.1. The shortcomings of governance and *para-governance* as an alternative logic and empirical complement

Sustainability governance is a concept stemming from the inter-disciplinary fields of political ecology and environmental politics that deals with the management (i.e. administrative) and decision-making (i.e. political) processes regarding the interface of the socio-sphere and the biosphere (Hannigan, 2006). In other words, governance encompasses all elements of the agential dimension of socio-natural developments. Unlike the concept of government, which allocates the sole responsibility and authority for binding decision-making, implementation, and the policing of their observance to a formal governing body – the state – governance is a softer and vaguer concept referring to the stewardship of collective affairs by a variety of actors (including government, markets, networks, private actors) and a variety of means (laws, informal norms, power, etc.) (Rosenau, 1992), and emphasizes whole system management (e.g. water-basin, ecosystem, or bioregional management approaches) (Tàbara, 2005). The global dimension of sustainability governance in the context of the Anthropocene is best captured in the concept of Earth System governance, which aims at bringing the combined,

interlinked, and complex *impact of humans on planetary systems* under its purview: "it is about the societal steering of human activities with regard to the long-term stability of geobiophysical systems" (Biermann, 2014, p. 59).

The concept of governance has also been tailored to fit the management of far-reaching systemic change, as in the increasingly popular literature on "system transitions" and "transition management" (e.g. Geels, 2011; Loorbach, 2007)[233], which stems from a blend of academic traditions in innovation, history, and technology studies.

As became apparent from the reviewed case studies, a major cleavage in governance discussions is that regarding the preferred steering-mode, i.e. whether the regulation of socio-natural life is better suited to political-democratic or technocratic-managerial (including market-steering) modes of governance. The classical answer in the tradition of emancipatory social movements of the 1970s and 1980s has been univocal: ecological sustainability, as well as social justice, is intrinsically bound to democratization and political forms of interaction. The genesis of unsustainability hence lies in the technocratic and corporatist takeover of the regulatory apparatus of the state, with the tacit complicity of a passive and apathic citizenry. Default answers to this question dominating current critical literature assigns a key role to a strengthened state supported by a revitalized, deepened, and widened democracy, furthering either greater participation in representative schemes or more direct forms of democratic engagements.

Although the unsustainability lock-in effects of vested interests and supportive political elites are sufficiently well-documented in this same literature and beyond, I argue that notwithstanding significant differences otherwise, both stances of 'democratic optimism' and 'technocratic managerialism' share at least some of the common assumptions and goals detailed below, as a result of which, I argue, both fail to capture the inherent quality of (let alone to promote) transformative collective learning, and therefore make governance (be it democratic or technocratic) ill-suited to fostering whole-societal transformative processes.

What's wrong with governance?

[233] For a timely cautionary comment on these scholarly treads, see Shove & Walker (2007)

The observed limitations of governance in the face of geostorical challenges are summarized eloquently by Bruno Latour:

> "There seems to be a total disconnect between the scale of change required and the pallor or frailty of the feelings kindled by these transformations – which are nonetheless politely recognized as being "absolutely necessary". As if each of us is preparing for a revolution, but actionlessly and from our armchairs […] The fact is that, with the ecological crises, we are trapped in a dual excess: we have an excessive fascination for the inertia of the existing socio-technical systems and an excessive fascination for the total, global and radical nature of the changes that need to be made. The result is a frenetic snails' race. An apocalypse in slow motion [...] The enthusiasts of old-style progress often complain about what they call exaggeration, or 'millenarian fears', and even a return to religion and fanaticism. Yet, on the contrary, what should in fact strike us is the disconnect between the scale of the manifest threats and the placidity with which we calmly continue as if nothing were amiss [...] Changing trajectories means more than a mere apocalypse and is more demanding than a mere revolution. But where are the passions for such changes?" (Latour, 2010)

The paradox becomes apparent from Latour's account; yet the reasons behind it do not. Is it the mere apathy of the masses which, allowing the prevalence of vested interests over the common interest, with the complicity of corrupt, unwilling, or ignorant political elites, that explains the unsustainability lock-in? To me it seems clear that there are more structural reasons accounting for the failure of global sustainability governance, and that at least a large part of these can be linked to the inherent limitations of governance as a concept. Below is an attempt to summarize these reasons.

a. *Ambiguous role and status-quo proneness of the state*: Dominant institutionalist theory in political science and governance studies sees the state as a problem-debating instance which, mobilized through debates and critical movements, as well as through acute manifest issues, seeks to provide solutions to such problems. Instead, critical theories of the state and politics in the Gramscian tradition view hasted assumptions that the state is de facto willing or capable of regulating in the service of the common good as a liberal bias of post-war political culture (Acosta & Brand, 2017; Brand, 2014d), one which seems unwarranted in the face of a global post-democratic constellation (Crouch, 2004; Jörcke, 2008; Ritzi, 2014; Wolin, 2008). By contrast, such theories define the state (both those in the West as those in the postcolonial world) as a particular social relation mirroring existing power constellation in a society (Demirović, 2011). At the same time, it is an instance stabilizing these constellations. This implies no conspiratorial assumptions, but rather responds to the immanent logic of the political system referred to in previous chapters: to deflect the risk of social and political

instability, the state seeks to address social issues in such a way that society is not overwhelmed and that the balance of power is not significantly distorted. This has the positive effect of providing order, predictability, and often protecting from demagogical assaults, but also perpetuates status quo (Brand, 2014b, p. 16). Add to this the short-termism derived from the electoral cycle, and larger horizons of social change fall completely out of the purview of politics. In light of this view, Schellnhuber's observation that current climate policy is as effective as "re-arranging deck-chairs on the Titanic" should come as no surprise. Hence viewed from a transformative perspective, in turn, the state's structure-conservatism makes fertile ground for demagogical upsurge, with political candidates "queuing up to capitalize as quickly as possible on the (very relative) success of this or that legitimate demand" (Latouche, 2009, pp. 95–96). From the perspective of transformative learning, then, what is required is a form of governance, a form of energizing the collective spirit, that is capable of resisting the pressure towards achieving *any* fusion – to draw again on Alexander's dramaturgical metaphor – for the sake of achieving the *right* fusion. But the cultural preconditions for making the option of a 'right fusion' available have yet to be established (Latouche, 2009, p. 95). As long as achieving *any* fusion takes precedence over achieving the *right* fusion, transformative pathways will remain locked.

b. *Post-political illusion of common interest*: In policy circles, as well as in the underpinning scholarly inputs, problems are mostly viewed as curses of destiny, rather than as emerging out of specific social structures. Cooperation and multi-stakeholder participation in solution-making is regarded as inherently emancipatory and thus desirable. This policy obsession with defining "the problem" is misguiding, however, as there is not a problem, but rather a "plurality (…) of contradictory and contending problems, each one focused by the shared credibility it enjoys in the eyes of those who subscribe to it, and each held separate from the rest by the mutual incredibility" (Thompson, 1984, p. 336). The idea of political contention as a 'coming to terms' of diverse views about how to best reach an alleged 'common interest' is thus a post-political illusion (Swyngedouw, 2011). Agonism is inherent to the political condition; therefore, we should stop treating diversity, contention, and contradiction as pathologies that need to be eradicated before any progress can be made. Fücks' (2013) suggestion that the lack of consensus about sustainability being compatible with economic growth being the cause of the

lack of progress made towards sustainability denotes the heavy bias of currently dominant views sustainability governance.

c. *Consensus and complexity reduction as precondition for governability*: But Fücks' argument is not misleading only for misrepresenting the rationality characteristic of politics: against his alleged lack of consensus, the world has now in fact seen over a quarter-century of virtually undisputed dominance of the discourse of ecological modernization, which purports the achievability of ecological sustainability within the parameters of the current system as its key ideational marker, with too little and too late to show for. Furthermore, this homogenization of the SD discourse has led to what Blühdorn (2007, 2009)calls the "post-ecologist paradox", that is: the coexistence of a near-absolute consensus with respect to the unsustainability of Western consumer life-styles and an equally absolute determination to sustain such lifestyles. This paradox seems more plausible an explanation for the continued pathway of unsustainability than the ill-advised request for even greater homogenization.

   To be sure, political decision-making and governability require some level of pragmatic compromising, yet the vital point, from the perspective of collective learning, is that these "do not degenerate into compromises at the intellectual level" (Latouche, 2009, p. 66): indeed, overcoming ontological and epistemological monocultures is not only a matter of democratic right or social inclusion (especially when there is a consistent pattern of exclusion!), but a matter of allowing for the necessary narrative or symbolic variations for learning to take place (Eder, 2008), or, from a system-theoretical perspective, for the *resilience* of complex systems. The American Anthropology Association Statement on Humanity and Climate Change (2015) makes clear that ontological diversity is—in itself—vital to sustainability: "The archaeological record shows that diversity and flexibility increase resilience to stress in complex adaptive systems." (cited in Paulson, 2017)

d. *Pragmatism as a cultural mandate*: the above requirement of overcoming ontological and epistemological monocultures, however, clashes against the simplifying and homogenizing pressures of pragmatism. In Western-style modern culture – even in activist circles devoted to 'changing the world' – idealism is devaluated. Action, pragmatism, achievability, demonstrability have set through as the validation proof for the worth of ideas, actions, and persons. Yet pragmatism is inherently conservative: when prevalent definitions of 'reality' are

deliberately allowed to set the boundaries of the desirable or the expressible (provided the alternatives are thinkable, as a minimum precondition), interventions aimed at "improving" that 'reality' are likely to stabilize this very definition of reality and thus actually work *against* alternatives emerging.

e. *Dominant concept of 'system' lacking complexity*. The pragmatist drive discussed above, along with material framework conditions (e.g. the administrative logic of budgeting), constrains agents to focus on concrete, discrete problems (issue-silos) to "solve", in a pre-specified time-horizon (usually short-term), rather than on underlying unsustainable cultural and social structures. For example, 'transition management' deals with problems which can often be framed as *symptoms* from a broader systemic perspective, while deeply anchored unsustainable life-styles are not acknowledged enough (Shove & Walker, 2007). As Eriksen and Schober (2016: 3) argue, "The concept of habit – in the double meaning of the word of learned pattern and addiction – may be a crucial component for understanding the interplay between social, political, economic, and cultural factors motivating our era of denial." (cited in Paulson, 2017, p. 439). Yet this would require institutional cross-fertilization thus overwhelming the institutional infrastructure organized in autopoietic functional sub-systems, as described by Niklas Luhmann – this is what Ulrich Beck (1992) referred to as "organized irresponsibility". (cf. Section 7.2 for a lengthier discussion)

f. *The illusion of control*: arguably the most tragic learning failure of the past four decades of ineffective global sustainability governance is that we still believe to be 'in charge' of the fate of socio-natural systems. In other words, the transcendental shift from history to *geostory* has gone unnoticed (Chakrabarty, 2009; Latour, 2014). Notwithstanding the necessary sustainment of a 'illusion of agency' for "motivating action and repair work", this should not lead governance agents to indulge in the comforting ideas that: a) the evolution of the Earth System can be managed with caps, emission certificates, and allow markets 'time to mature'; and b) that governance agents stand within, nor outside the systems they seek to influence.

g. *Politics and democracy spatially and temporally 'out of synch':* the most dynamic and innovative sectors of contemporary societies generate an effect of growing complexity (translating into increasing functional differentiation) and overall (though de-synchronized) acceleration in the pace of

social evolution that overwhelms bureaucratic coping and political control mechanisms. Similarly, they exceed the time-consuming process of democratic deliberation. In addition, the pluralization of societies entails less possibility of reliance on conventions and more difficulty to constitute a quorum for decision-making (even to identify relevant stakeholders!), and the greater complexity makes the world less and less intelligible. In spatial terms, the well-researched but ill-addressed mismatch in geographical scales of globally operating but locally regulated systems generating transboundary effects of global interconnectedness that overwhelm the structures of the 'Westphalian system' – key for sustainability governance is, for example, the issue of "ecologically unequal exchange" (i.a. Bunker, 1984; Hornborg, 1998; Rice, 2007; J. T. Roberts & Parks, 2009) – adds to the worldwide crisis of politics and democracy. The consequences of this crisis can be summarized as follows:

- politics becomes situational and reactive;
- it tends to 'delegate' decision-making onto other institutional or informal arenas (judicialization, economic deregulation, ethical privatization) (H. Rosa, 2010, 2011)
- rise of the 'competitor state': the state ceases to be a sovereign power regulating economic activity, and rather becomes a bidder on the global financial market seeking to offer the best conditions to attract investors (Crouch, 2004)
- the remaining political energy becomes exhausted in "defending the already acquired rights", which, for affluent social groups in the global North, but increasingly also in the South, often implies clinging onto globally non-generalizable patterns of consumption (Brand & Wissen, 2017). The upsurge of right-wing populism desperately clinging onto privileged (imperial) ways of life seems to ratify Blühdorn's warnings about the structural limitations of liberal, consumer democracies to turn the tide of conservative politics towards a transformative one. Furthermore, democracy is becoming a reactionary rather than an emancipatory force (Blühdorn, 2011), or, more precisely, the concept of 'emancipation' is increasingly becoming synonym with the maintenance of privileges.

h. *The conflicted state:* Tim Jackson's argument reviewed in Chapter 3 was that insofar the role of government is equated with maintaining system-immanent macro-economic stability, governments will systematically undermine their own capability of steering away from unsustainable development paths (Jackson, 2009b, p. 96). Indeed, the relentless pursuit of

novelty at the expense of socio-ecological commitment – both on the side of individuals systematically exposed to status anxiety (in a positive feedback-loop with increasing affluence), and on the side of businesses under the pressure of market competition ('innovate or die') – becomes a structural imperative. Hence, for an effective advancement of transformative learning, the role of government – or of governance, for that matter – should be fundamentally revised.

i. *Imagined boundaries of governance:* One of the stumbling blocks of sustainability governance approaches – even of the most progressive and well-intended ones – has been assuming *political feasibility* and *cultural acceptability* as given, ignoring the fact that these are also 'dependent variables' of ongoing interventions in socio-political and cultural life by a variety of actors, including those in the formal political system. Again, this represents a blind spot of the liberal mindset dominant in political and management theorizing and practice, which would hold the idea of the state intervening in shaping culture as unacceptable government interventionism into the very fabric of free societies, forcing "unwilling victims to sacrifice their God-given freedoms and to betray innate self-interests" (Paulson, 2017, p. 440), concealing the fact that current political and cultural structures are already and necessarily (to a large extent, at least) the outcome of political action – or inaction: from the way educational systems are shaped, to the importance accorded to certain economic or social indicators, by the impact of planning on public spaces and social relations, by the influence of wage and employment policy on the so-called 'work-life balance' or on the opportunities for socio-economic mobility (and hence on family-structure and stability), by the influence of trade-rules and standards on consumer behavior, by how advertising is regulated, by public procurement and decisions on subsidies or targeted financial support to civil society initiatives, etc. (Jackson, 2009a, p. 95), the regulatory framework and individual political decisions intersect social cultural and material matrixes. In addition, government agency can be used to counterbalance the impacts of the interventions of other governance agents in the social fabric: worldwide longitudinal data support the thesis that behavioral trends such as fuel consumption and use of credit, or health-patterns like obesity can be linked to the action of powerful forces purposively changing the shape of societies at precipitous speed (Schor 1993, 1999, cited in Paulson, 2017, p. 440). In spite of the above, business as usual is widely perceived as the product of apolitical and impartial forces. Yet from a social-constructivist perspective, the fact that we make reality as

> much as reality makes us appears as self-evident. Gearing the leverage of the state towards social and ecologically sound targets, based on the most authoritative science available, provides no base at all for accusations of authoritarian manipulation, rather the contrary: it would mean fulfilling the historically unprecedented mission of political leaders in the 21st Century, who – once factoring in the Anthropocene – are accountable not only to their constituency, but by extension also to stakeholders elsewhere in the world, as well as to the future generations which have no say in decisions that are determinant of their fate.

Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Change Impacts (PIK) and head of the German Advisory Council on Global Change (WBGU) eloquently articulated the conceptual gap emerging from current understandings of governance: adaptation is the governance strategy used to *avoid the unmanageable*; mitigation is the strategy aimed at *managing the unavoidable*. But what about the *unmanageable which has already become unavoidable* (or will so in the near future)?

What room is there for governance and politics in the face of the unmanageable?

Recalling Oskar Negt's dictum: at a time when the continuation of 'reality' has become inviable, we can only rely on utopias to stay realistic. Our empirical findings disclosed existing potentials and emergent developments that, from a perspective of transformative agency, can be harnessed towards a global social-ecological "real utopia". When additionally factoring in the above enounced limitations, a strong case can be made that the ultimate goal of a global sustainability transformation lies beyond the reach of conventional governance. Sustainability governance, as we define it, has reached its limits.

Given the inherent limitations in our capacity to govern global environmental change, what is required is moving beyond conventional notions of governance towards a conception that accounts for the possibility of altering the (otherwise taken for granted) framework in which governance is defined, a "new vision of governance" (Jackson, 2009a, p. 11). The question arises, however: "how do you invent the political constitution that is able to absorb the Anthropocene, namely the reaction of the earth system to our action, in a way that renders politics again comprehensible to those who are simultaneously actor, victim, accomplices and responsible for such a situation?" (Latour, 2015)

Since we have defined transformative collective learning as condition of possibility (necessary though not sufficient) for a social-ecological transformation of the globally dominant cultural model (see

Chapter 1), the answer to this question should be that this new vision of governance would consist, in turn, in the creation of preconditions and in the deliberate promotion of collective learning yielding "radical innovations which redefine the rules of the game; which render previously important forms of competence redundant and which reconfigure interpretations of value and significance" (Abernathy and Clark, 1985, cited in Shove, 2010a, p. 6).

In geostorical times, learning goes beyond the adaptation to exogenously generated changes (by the hitherto considered to be 'autonomous forces of nature'), out to the capacity of generating socio-natural contexts, the capacity to create, through 'facilitated emergence', a new system in line with the biophysical boundaries of the planet. It is the capacity for creating an agential space between *forecasting* and *backcasting* (Pelfini, 2014; Raskin, 2008; Unger, 2004) between the possible (and thus trivial in terms of transformative change) and the desirable (often unreachable). Fundamental change need not be revolutionary change, but can rather unfold in fragmentary, piecemeal, and even contradictory fashion, through "a creative interpretation of the maturing possibilities" (Thie, 2013, p. 159), that is, through real utopias. In anticipation of an almost certain ecological Armageddon lying ahead of the business-as-usual course of development, it means paving the transition from the "politically impossible to the politically inevitable".

Such de-centralized yet deliberate engagement to provide for the emergence of transformative learning and thus for the preconditions for an effective governance in the Anthropocene I call *para-governance*.

The para-governance approach to socio-ecological transformations can thus be conceptualized, in other words, as the as the type of agency strategically engaging in the creation of ideational and material preconditions (i.e. discursive contexts) for transformative governance interventions to be effective or even viable, in the first place.

The Greek-rooted prefix "para" is purposefully used here to connote both its ambiguous etymological meanings of "beside, side by side", on the one hand, and of "beyond, past by", on the other, indicating that para-governance is both an auxiliary and derivative character to the concept of governance, but a transcending value, at the same time, insofar a condition of possibility for effective governance in the Anthropocene. It serves here as an epistemic and cultural strategy opening up spaces to think differently about ways of dealing with (transformative) governance questions. It is also aimed at stressing not the continuities (here 'extended governance' might have proven worthier) but rather the ruptures with the logic of governance:

- para-governance is not aimed at conquering the spaces of power with the illusion of straightforwardly 'implementing' solutions. It's battle ground is the terrain of socio-cultural imaginaries and identities derived therefrom.
- It does not substitute governance, but complements it by creating preconditions for effective interventions, probably in combination with exogenous systemic disruptions (environmental and socio-economic shocks)
- It constitutes a social security-device fostering resilience and shielding from the phenomenon of "myopic choice" (i.e. a social 'immune system')
- para-governance draws no finishing line, but the starting point; i.e. fosters comprehensive understanding of the scale and span of the required transformation
- para-governance serves as a bridge between short-term, pragmatist, competitive politics and long-term, normative, cooperative politics.

As can be inferred from the aforesaid, para-governance does not replace governance – though it does certainly have profound implications for the *expectations* we pose on governance knowledge-repertoires, institutions, and strategies: what is governable can improve particular aspects of the situation, help coordinate action, etc., but is inherently incapable of transforming its own conditions of possibility. It also implies changing the *orientation* of governance interventions towards transformative learning rather than specific goals. All three societal levels are implied:

- Micro-level: individuals as social beings need to be embedded into transformative contexts of practice (Shove, 2010a) and "cosmopolitan zones of contact" (Santos, 2004) for enhanced transformational potential counterweighting the dilemmas of the 'conflicted' and the 'missing' agent.
- Meso-level: institutional and material infrastructures need to be put in place to foster learning; e.g. through framing, orienting, shaping, and enabling guardrails (Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014) (cf. Chapter 3, Section 3.3.1)
- Macro-level: (post)governance arrangements oriented towards deconstructing unsustainable regimes need to be put in place (e.g. blueprints for macro-economic redesign) (Jackson, 2009a; Latouche, 2009)

The aim of this doctoral thesis can be now reformulated as a twofold goal: First, outlining the conceptual and theoretical contours of a para-governance approach to the global transformation towards sustainability – to a *zukunftsfähige Gesellschaft*, a society which is "capable of future" –; and, second, gaining empirical insights from grounded para-governance-experiments in meso-macro (sub)political settings in the Global North and in the Global South. And the dilemma posed by Schellnhuber may have now found a possible answer: while mitigation seeks to keep the unmanageable away, and adaptation to deal with the unavoidable, the agential response to the unmanageable inevitabilities is the para-governed transformation of socio-natural relations.

Before undertaking a more systematic comparison between the logics of governance and para-governance, the following sub-section offers a brief review of the precedents of this concept in the literature.

7.1.1. Precedents for para-governance in the literature

Several analysts have argued that the rise of the concept of "transformation" is directly proportional to the recognition of limits to global environmental governance (Brand, 2016b; Brand & Wissen, 2013; Newell, 2012; Park, Conca, & Finger, 2008; Stirling, 2015). Many of the limitations pointed out in the previous section are increasingly being acknowledged by governance scholars and critical intellectuals from other domains of scientific inquiry.

There is then an increasing insight that dealing with geostorical challenges requires profound changes (Hackmann & Moser, 2013b; New Economics Foundation, 2009). The inadequacy of partial and incremental approaches to the crisis (separating, for example, climate change and biodiversity loss) is also increasingly acknowledged. The transversal or overarching scope of change across societal sub-systems is brought on focus, instead (Driessen & al., 2013). A mode of governance tailored to the 'wicked' problems of the Anthropocene need to factor-in complex articulations and the danger of offsetting negative consequences from one field onto another (e.g. to produce crops for agrofuels by fostering industrialized agriculture and the eviction of peasants from their land). O´Brien (2012, p. 668) goes even further and argues that effective climate governance implies "a questioning of the assumptions, beliefs, values, commitments, loyalties and interests that have created structures, systems and behaviors that contribute to anthropogenic climate change, social vulnerability and other

environmental problems in the first place". Similarly, Latouche holds the transformation of the ideational field as a precondition for the transformation of the material sphere, whereby the goal of a "more sophisticated project" of governance is "to create the preconditions for that change of direction" (Latouche, 2009, p. 76). Critical scholars close to the Rosa-Luxembourg foundation in Germany (and to the thought tradition it represents) emphasize the field of visions, values, and pathways as a central terrain of contestation (Rilling, 2014). In the same vein, Enrique Leff (2004a) refers to building sustainability as the design of new worlds of life by changing the meaning of the signs that have fixed meanings of things; Giorgos Kallis (2017) argues for strategies so that material downsizing "not be experienced as welfare loss"; and Hans Thie, invoking Hegel, speaks of a "soft enlightenment" altering cultural parameters, so that what is considered right today becomes incorrect tomorrow (Brand, 2016a; Thie, 2013)

Elizabeth Shove (2010a), in turn, emphasizes the material dimensions of a governance for a transformation, arguing for a new style of intervention: one that is more modest (abandoning illusions of manageability), and, at the same time, more ambitious, recognizing that any political intervention has an impact in the matrix of social practices, even if this is not explicitly acknowledged.

In addition, we can find a range of concepts bearing some similarity to that of para-governance: The concept of meta-governance (Evans, 2012; Grießhammer & Brohmann, 2015; Kooiman, 2003; Soransen, 2006) refers to the "overarching steering possibilities in the face of systemic complexities" (Grießhammer & Brohmann, 2015), addressing the level of socio-cultural norms governing the governance process as a whole. However, the heavy rationalist 'contractarian' bias (which we also found in the WBGU report), which recreates the rationalist illusion of political liberalism, according to which the individual is the source or meaning (Aguilar et al., 2015, p. 127) keeps it anchored in the realm of explicit social norms, rather than in that of implicit socio-cognitive rules. (Eder, 2007)

The open-endedness and radical agonism missing in meta-governance is emphasized in the concept of *futuring* as a process meant to "capture and interpret futures, to envision them and, therefore, to make them to an object of *current* (non-)decision and (non-)action" towards a transformation (Brand, 2016b, p. 13; Rilling, 2014).

Arturo Escobar (2013) refers to the rise of ontological politics[234], in the wake of which transformative experiments with unsustainability-related cultural matrixes have become objects of political struggle. Departing from the premise that unsustainability is structurally designed into our everyday life as the result of concrete design practices, ontological politics revolves around the "decentering of design from its anthropocentric and rationalistic basis and its recreation as a tool against the unsustainability that has become entrenched with the modern world" (Escobar, 2013)

A common point of departure of all the above is the aspiration to identifying and unveiling established cultural, material, and political power structures and processes locking contemporary societies into unsustainability, to criticize and overcome, and new emergent real utopias to be further developed and stabilized (Acosta & Brand, 2017). As surfaces from this brief review, most of the contents fitting the bill of para-governance are suggested in more or less impressionistic or systematized fashion in the existing literature. Missing, however, is a conceptual-theoretical digression effort clarifying and emphasizing the implications of what we have named para-governance as a form of agential intervention contrasting with (yet not opposing or displacing) governance.

7.1.2. Contrasting governance and para-governance

The following exercise of conceptual contouring by contrasting proceeds through comparing the ethos of governance with that of para-governance in terms of the categories of goal or purpose, boundaries, methods, agoras, scope of intervention, context of applicability, as well as main agoras and agents.

Regarding their respective goals, while governance seeks to bring about changes, para-governance seeks to create the material conditions and social imaginaries (or discursive repertoires) that will expand the scope of possible actions towards change. Para-governable social learning is thus foregrounded as a social goal as opposed to (assumedly) governable societal change, clinging on the assumption that change is a function not of learning itself, but of the systemic impacts of learning (Eder, 1999) – likely in combination with system-disruptive exogenous crises. In this sense, para-

234 The idea of 'ontological politics' arises in the wake of 'the ontological turn' in social theory. While originated in the sphere of cultural anthropology, this trend of thought overflew its original 'disciplinary container'. See a.o. (Chakrabarty, 2000; Connolly, 2005; de la Cadena, 2010; Escobar, 2012b, 2013; Latour, 2004; Leff, 2010; Rehbein, 2010, 2013)

governance implies embracing the fundamental impossibility of 'managing', 'governing', or (techno-)'fixing' the Earth-System (including its human-made sub-systems) in any straight-forward sense, and therewith radically give up the illusion of control, thereby distancing itself from kindred concepts such as 'stewardship' of the transformation (Vogt, 2013) and even 'meta-governance' (Grießhammer & Brohmann, 2015).

Rejecting naïve optimism, however, does not amount to renouncing the possibility of meaningful transformative agency: Instead, para-governance recognizes, on the one hand, non-human agency (such as the unpredictable consequences of climate change and of sharp erosion in biodiversity) – what Latour calls 'actants' – and, on the other hand, put human agency in the center to take advantage of geostorical windows of opportunity to transform structures that appear otherwise unmodifiable. Governance assumes the opposite: that it can control the climate, but cannot control capitalism (N. Klein, 2014). This is why it easier for us, says Slavoj Žižek, to imagine the end of the world than the serious possibility of fundamental social change. para-governance implies embracing a new style of intervention: one that is more modest – insofar abandoning illusions of manageability –, but, at the same time, more ambitious, "recognizing that policy interventions across the board have effect in shaping future ways of life whether they recognize it or not" (Shove, 2010a, p. 11)

This brings us to the issue of the boundaries of each form of agency. As stated above, the assumption of political feasibility and cultural acceptability as given by conventional governance leads transformative prospects to the cul-de-sac of the "conflicted state" (Jackson, 2009a), to "simulative politics" (Blühdorn, 2007) and similar diagnoses. While governance is limited by this adaptive character, para-governance aims at the (in principle, uncontrolled) expansion of the politically possible and culturally acceptable; that is: para-governance is generative. Which political and social effects will exactly result from it and when is difficult to predict, it cannot be planned, but nonetheless demands an active political and social conformation.

When it comes to valid forms of knowledge serving as a support-base, governance typically showcases a bias toward scientific knowledge, which is deemed necessary (particularly at government level) to achieve a certain level of public legitimacy, insofar scientific knowledge is culturally validated as the most authoritative form of knowledge – reason for which also private forms of governance rely on scientific and technological knowledge. The "excess fascination" that Latour observed with techno-scientific imaginaries clashes, however, turns into disenchantment in the face of its impotence for effectively addressing pressing social and ecological predicaments. Indeed, the 'excess' character of

this fascination lies in the absolutizing of Cartesian rationality (and the techno-scientific knowledge built upon it), for all realms of human and natural existence. In the spirit of Chakrabarty's metaphor, para-governance seeks to 'provincializing' Cartesian rationality, as one possible source of valid knowledge whose pertinence is contingent: if you want to travel to the moon, you need techno-scientific knowledge; but if you want to achieve sustainability, you might be better served with indigenous knowledge. Indian writer and activist Roy Arundhati writes:

> The first step towards reimagining a world gone terribly wrong would be to stop the annihilation of those who have a different imagination –an imagination that is outside of capitalism as well as communism. An imagination which has an altogether different understanding of what constitutes happiness and fulfillment. To gain this philosophical space, it is necessary to concede some physical space for the survival of those who may look like the keepers of our past, but who may really be the guides to our future. (Arundhati, 2010)

para-governance thus seeks to generate, protect, and foster an 'epistemic biodiversity', as well as facilitating the agonistic dialogue of these multiple forms of knowledge (artistic, religious, forgotten or marginalized cultural models, etc.). While governance weights alternatives against fixed criteria of validity or acceptability, para-governance considers "alternative ways of looking at alternatives" (S. Santos), which redefine the rules of the game and "render previously important forms of competence redundant, and which reconfigure interpretations of value and significance" (Shove, 2010a, p. 6). Whereas governance is concerned with building sustainability (*innovation*), para-governance acknowledges the need to unbuild unsustainability first (*trans-formation*).

The above invites the question of how to "handle complexities in a non-reductionist way, while at the same time avoid generating ever-more complexities until we submerge into chaos" (Law and Mol 2002, cited in Clarke, 2005, p. 553). This question has both political and managerial implications. Political implications pertain the legitimacy and efficiency/efficacy of decision-making processes; managerial implications refer to the manageability of an increasingly unintelligible object of governance (H. Rosa, 2010).

From a managerial perspective, governance relies on complexity reduction as a precondition to maintain control over the object; para-governance, instead, fosters and facilitates emergence and resilience through self-organization, applying instruments of 'minimalistic management' to help frame baseline issues, provide interpretive and normative orientation emerging from discursively balanced sustainability debates, shape infrastructural preconditions, and enable or empower individual and

collective transformative agents (Schneidewind & Zahrnt, 2014). This minimalistic management is understood as a way of 'organizing the unplannable' (WBGU, 2011) and as the best chance of developing resilient and thriving social structures, which are better equipped to deal with the "unmanageable which has become unavoidable".

Suitable para-governance tools and practices, in this regard, would be, for example, the production of "societal commitment devices" (in the sense of A. Offer and Tim Jackson) as social-ecological guardrails offsetting the proneness to 'myopic choice' – i.e. preventing 'tragedies of the commons' and materializing what in chapter 2 we called, following Levinas, "responsibility in the third person", an institutional mediation proportionate to the challenges of Anthropocene between individual freedoms.

Instead of linear problem formulation-analysis-solution schemes, which are ill-suited to handling so-called 'wicked policy problems' (Thompson, 1984), para-governance agents deploy open-ended techniques such as *backstaging*[235], where discussions in discursively balanced stakeholder participation is crucial to avoid blind spots. Useful scientific inputs to these process would be those helping to understand the details of path-dependence; the spatial and temporal configuration of innovation (or trans-formation) junctions, or the potential for aligning and modulating the elements of social practice (De Wit, Van den Ende et al. 2002; Rip 2006 cited in Shove, 2010a, p. 8). The reliance of governance on control through complexity-reduction seems adequate as applied to simple, stable, predictable systems. For complex, unstable, unpredictable systems, however, a para-governance approach embracing complexity and relying on resilience (instead of control) through self-organization is much better-suited.

Regarding the political implications of complexity, the abovementioned preference for a single epistemic yardstick in the logic of governance also makes sense regarding its operational focus on decision-making through the attainment of (ideally) a 'rational consensus'. The necessarily monistic and universalist episteme implicit in the very idea of a 'rational' consensus is a precondition, at least in the classical liberal worldview, for efficient deliberation and decision-making. Liberal consensus is thus homogenizing and can only be achieved at the price of sidelining voices, negating conflict (what

235 Worth noting, however, is that even techniques like *backcasting* are severely limited, considering the dazzling number of variables and uncertainties (known unknowns and unknown unknowns) potentially relevant in the process of a social-ecological transformation. They ought to be seen as a discussion-trigger and a learning mechanism in the sense of fostering plural rationalities to come into dialogue with each other – i.e. as a para-governance device –, rather than as a management tool *stricto sensu*.

Chantal Mouffe calls antagonism), and banishing stark polyphony to the margins of the social system. This homogenizing logic, however, goes against the essential precondition for collective learning, namely the destabilization of prevailing symbolic orders (Eder, 1999). para-governance thus implies, in the first place, deliberately provoking such destabilization; that is, opening the cannon of knowledge to allow for different ways of knowing and ways of being in the world to come into agonistic interaction under the premises of systemic mutual interdependence and common (even if unequal) vulnerability (see Chapter 2). It goes in line with what Latour (2015) calls a "radicalization of politics". The role of para-governance agents is intervening to correct power imbalances, rather than achieving efficiency in decision-making. As stated above, it is not about "making" the transformation or controlling it, but rather about staying open for it and providing it with the social space to manifest (Vogt, 2013).

By the same token, para-governance does not rely on seizing power, as governance does. Indeed: Dialectical interactive mechanisms with decentralized agency, sometimes in emergent constellations of myriad solo-acting acting agents, sometimes networked in polyarchic or democratic configurations (or combinations of both, as Bauwens suggested), seem better suited to "organize the unplannable". Even today, in contrast to the stagnation in political negotiations (and imagination), a new dynamism is already visible at the level of cultural evolution, for instance in the potentially revolutionary advent of the collaborative commons through digitally potentiated P2P-networks and the emerging infrastructure of the Internet of Things.

These ideas bear a strong Foucauldian flavor, remitting to Foucault's (2006, p. 238) notion of "counter-conduct", not as a mere 'misconduct' in the passive sense, but as rebuttal of regimes and practices deployed to exerting control over others, and as the proactive "proposal of new regimes of organization of practice". In the same vein, John Holloway (2002) deems the idea of 'seizing power', as something that would be located in a specific empowered space such as the state, a mere illusion. Instead, he proposes the thesis that power would reside in the fragmentation of social relations, so that opposing or balancing this power – which he calls "anti-power" (as opposed to counter-power) – amounts to resisting and fighting the mechanisms that case such fragmentation, or – we might add, in a more Habermasian conceptualization – the systematic subordination of lifeworlds to the monistic logic of bureaucracy or the market.

Based on the above, however, it would seem that governance and para-governance are mutually exclusive, rather than complementary. This could be the case if this were an ontological comparison,

rather than an analytical one. Governance and para-governance are rivalrous logics, rather than rivalrous entities. But they can have separate existences: while governance operates in the agora of foreground politics, para-governance is at home in the realm of background sub-politics; while the former is subject to public opinion and oriented toward problem-solving, the latter is shaping public opinion, and oriented toward processes of subjectivation and problem-framing (and thus spared from the logic of politics, which includes bargaining, lobbying, and seeking command)

However, the fact that both forms of agency have separate existences does not imply that they are not imbricated, or that there is no interface between governance and para-governance. Indeed, para-governance is to secure the stream of 'fresh' and discursively balanced (Santo's "cognitive justice") inputs into cultural and political life, on which governance draws for decision-making. Thus, para-governance balances out the trend towards homogeneity implicit in governance, and, at the same time, makes it possible and effective under geostorical conditions. Now what does the interface between the two look like? can the apparent contradiction between para-governance's radical *pluriversalism* and governance's requirement for complexity reduction in order to maintain governability be reconciled?[236]

The dilemmas of democracy – the simulative character of liberal consumerist democracies posed by Blühdorn, and its inherent difficulty as a decision-making mechanism in dealing with cryptically complex issues and radical pluralism, as problematized by Rosa – are not satisfactorily addressed neither in the GT nor in the BV debates. Yet scholarly theoretical imagination comes to help: John Dryzek (2010) argues that 'counting heads' is not the only possible basis for democratic legitimacy. Instead, he advocates for "discursive representation" as a practical program for both democratic legitimacy and political innovation, as opposed to conventional forms of representation which overstate individual autonomy and fail to acknowledge the role of cultural and socio-cognitive or phenomenological horizons in shaping individual preferences. A discursive conception of democracy would rather emphasize the balance of discursive contestation in the public sphere from a pragmatic vantage point, i.e. a representative variety of the actually existing discursive spectrum. In conceiving of discourse à la Foucault, that is, as the product of power-knowledge regimes, it becomes clear that

[236] Note that this question differs from the classical dilemma between democratic legitimacy and political efficacy, insofar diversity here is a precondition for *both* legitimacy and efficacy of governance under geostorical conditions. In that sense, our dilemma is more akin to Hannah Arendt's (1998) concern with reconciling *poiesis* and *praxis*.

striving for discursive diversity should be an end in itself from the perspective of democratic legitimacy[237], without which it would degenerate into a "tyranny of majorities". Furthermore, in accordance the argument that the main stakeholders of sustainability issues are geographically and temporally located outside the boundaries of political constituencies, a discursive approach to democratic representation would allow for some form of representation of not yet born, incapable, and indeterminate subjects at a global scale in socio-political deliberation processes[238]. Indeed: discursive representation allows for a conception of the deliberating *polis* based on the idea of *networks*, rather than of *demos* (see discussion supra in Chapter 7)

An additional argument in favor of discursive democracy is that it would help correcting the bias of liberal democracy towards "procedural legitimation", thereby neglecting input and output dimensions of democratic legitimacy (Dingwerth, 2007). The output dimensions of democratic legitimacy are better covered in our empirical case studies. Concepts such as that of "non-reformist reforms" break the dualisms of governance versus para-governance, or reform and transformation as two consecutive steps (today reformism, tomorrow its radicalization); rather, it sets on the design of reform proposals as 'trojan horses' containing a revulsive element (Brand, 2016a; Gorz, 1964; J. G. Speth, 2007)[239].

Lastly, with regard to the agents of governance and para-governance, as well as their roles, grounded insights were delivered already through the case studies: while the models of the 'double helix' and the 'triple helix' involve the well-known characters of state, science, and civil society (business, which is a starring character in mainstream sustainability discourses, noteworthily plays a subordinate role) (Scholl & Mewes, 2015), the roles performed by them are anything but conventional, as we encountered a rather facilitating state (involve practices of legitimation, diffusion, targeted support, etc.), a creative civil society acting as 'game-changer', and an active role of science as change- and democratizing agent. Whereas the regulatory logic of states and markets as main actors in conventional

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[237] Discursive pluralism should not be equated, however, to discourse particularization or atomization. Chakrabarty (Chakrabarty, 2000) sheds light on the fact that fundamentalist (i.e. ideological) positions are found not only in hegemonic discourse but also in marginal, and makes the case to 'decolonize' both mainstream as well as decolonial and postcolonial knowledge production.

[238] For an extensive treatment of procedural aspects of discursive democracy (e.g. identification of discourses and thir representatives, issues of scale, linguistic and cultural translation, etc.), which falls outside the scope of our research, see Dryzek (Dryzek, 2010)

[239] Akin to the idea of "non-reformist reforms" in more recent formulations are concepts such as those of "radical reformism" by Joachim Hirsch (1994, cited in Brand, 2016a) and "double transformation" by Dieter Klein (2013).

sustainable development discourses is monistic (administrative and utility-maximizing, respectively), our 'learning-helixes' feature distributed agency with prominence of CS and plural regulatory logics.

It should be noted, however, that our empirical findings stem from a sample of discrete interventions and their effects (or else discursive representations), which, according to the conceptual framework developed in this chapter, can be framed as fitting the bill of para-governance; yet no claim can be made that such interventions – at least not all of them – were deliberately (let alone systematically) performed as driven by or conform to a coherent para-governance framework. So while the harbingers of transformative science, for example, do formulate their proposals in the spirit of para-governance, the Ecuadorean and Bolivian government did certainly not intend to act as para-governance agents, but rather to implement a BV-program according to the conventional logic of governance/ government – and so did their supporters. Therefore, the empirical findings of this research are thus not to be seen as 'evidence' of para-governance practices, but rather as useful hints for outlining the contours of an emerging concept, as initial inputs to a yet-to-be-defined repertoire of para-governance practices, which requires systematic elaboration and development.

A full-fledged para-governance role of the state can be developed out of forerunning ideational representations encountered in our data and in the literature, such as "activating state" (Lessenig), "partner state" (Bauwens), or "enabling state" (WBGU). Activism needs to be reimagined interactively in large transformative networks for greater consistency and leverage over culture and politics, alongside principles such as those summarized in the Smart CSOs "practical guide for the Great Transition" (Narberhaus & Sheppard, 2015).

But civil society is also a place for systematizing alternative contexts of practice, with new rituals to school ourselves in new habits. Religions, for example, can be of central significance here[240], since the ritual structuring of life transitions, the institutionalized celebration of hope and "encouragement to turning away from old habits and setting out on new paths is one of their core functions. Religion translates knowledge into emotionally effective ways of relating" (Vogt, 2013). For all their disadvantages otherwise, the often-criticized pyramidal structures of world-religions are in privileged position to systematically perform such a transformative role. Also the arts can play an important role

[240] Surely, religion can also play (and has often done so) the opposite role: that of educating people into the bourgeois morality, completely oriented to the stabilization of the status quo. (Vogt, 2013)

in re-educating our senses through a "re-colouring our conceptual templates of quality of life and progress".

Finally, in order to mainstream the conception of a "transformative science", the parameters of post-normal science necessitate wide adoption. Sterile scholarly dead heats of "contradictory certainties" need to give way to a risk-management approach, whereby the focus of academic actors is re-shifted from ever-sliding aspirations for "absolute certainty" or "greater precision" towards research agendas dominated by "matters of concern" (Latour, 2004), and the mainstream role of science is redefined from that of a service-provider of the system to that of a Simmelian *stranger* offering a unique, emancipatory-critical vantage point and pointing possible ways toward the more and more urgent, yet again and again procrastinated social-ecological transformation.

Table 18: Governance vs. Para-governance

Dimensions of comparison	Governance	Para-governance
Agora	Terrain of foreground politics (→ public opinion / oriented toward problem-solving)	Terrain of background sub-politics (→ oriented toward problem-framing and subjectivation)
Scope of intervention	Avoid the unmanageable (mitigation) and manage the unavoidable (adaptation)	Intervene where the unmanageable is already (or doomed to become) unavoidable (transformation = 'creating contexts')
Applicability	simple, stable, predictable systems. Relies on control	Complex systems. Relies on resilience through self-organization
Goal	Management of social change	Stewardship of social learning
Boundaries	Constrained by politically possible and culturally acceptable (adaptive)	expansion of the politically possible and culturally acceptable (generative)
Operational principles	Consensus (negation of conflict)	Agonism (acknowledgement of conflict)
	Complexity reduction	building resilience (commitment devices)
	Planning & executing	"organize the unplannable"
	innovation	trans-formation
Epistemology	Positivist (scientific knowledge)	Constructivist (multiple knowledges)
Main agents	State & markets (monistic regulatory mechanism: bureaucratic or economic)	Decentralized agency (plural regulatory mechanisms)

7.2. Discussion: towards an integral theory of social-ecological transformations?

While this research explored the interface of agency networks, meaning, and meso-level social structures as constraining or enabling upon agency in contingent spatiotemporal contexts, macro-level social structures have played a secondary role in our research design. But from the outset it was stated that our theoretical-empirical exploration was aimed at contributing to the bigger picture of an emerging critical "transformation theory" (cf. Chapter 1). While exploring the details of how the ideas of 'para-governance' and 'transformative agency' as a learning-driving agent would fit into a full-fledged theory of social-ecological transformations exceeds the scope of our analysis, worthwhile insights gained in this regard throughout the research can be summarized to indicate a direction for future theoretical and empirical explorations.

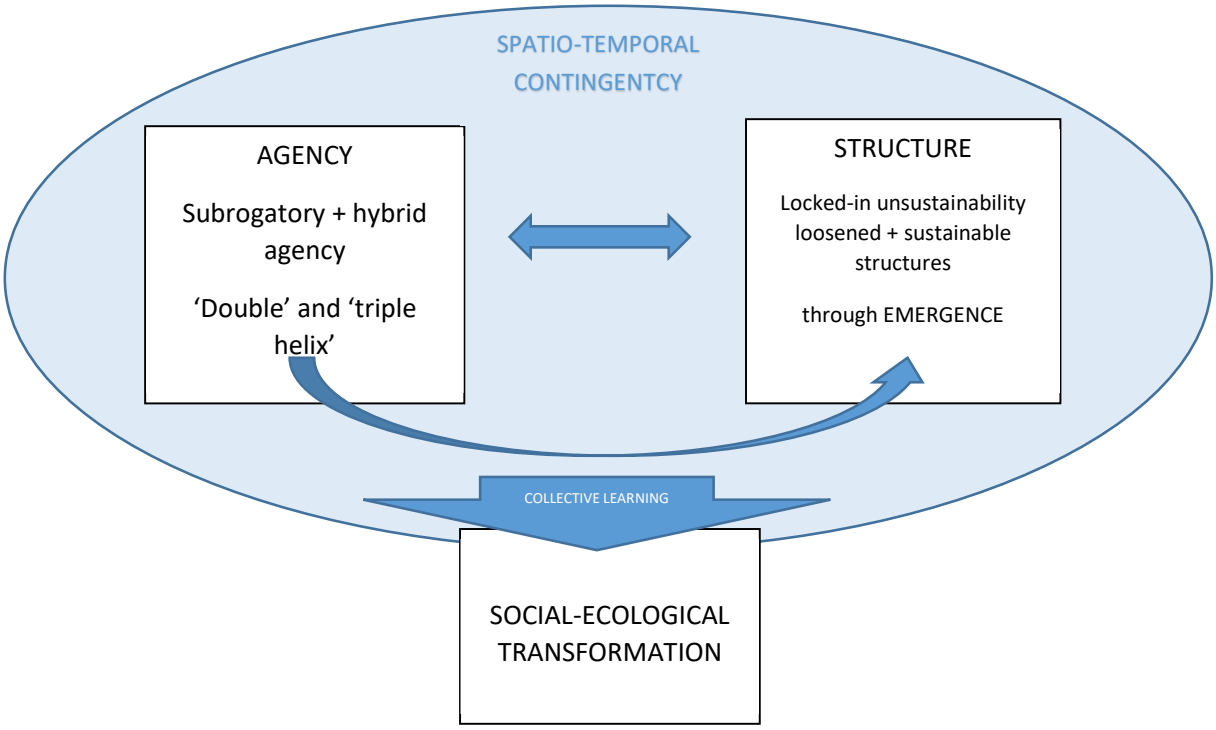
As stated in Chapter 1, collective learning is a necessary but not sufficient condition for social change (Eder, 1999). Socio-cultural change typically unleashes a slow, unconscious, involuntary evolution process with consequences which are difficult to predict; these, in turn, generating conflictive relations, that increase pressure towards change. Thus, the transformation of certain social conditions act upon both social restrictions and cultural meaning structuring social relations, simultaneously creating new conditions, which open the door to the collective action of new agents (Bajoit & Vanhulst, 2016). Furthermore: the relation between learning and change is mediated by systemic constraints and enablers, which can be more or less resilient (Eder, 1999) and over which agents can have more or less control. As shown here, however, the conditions of possibility for learning and the empowerment or emergence of transformative agency can indeed be largely influenced in a deliberate way, thereby facilitating, in turn, the emergence of both transformative agents and structural transformations.

The particularity of collective learning processes with social-ecological drivers, on which this research put an exclusive focus, is that global macro-structures are tendentially unstable (risk society), thus creating structural preconditions for transformative learning, part of which can be produced or activated deliberately through para-governance mechanisms. From a normative vantage point, there is agreement that the accountability of contemporary decision-making instances in terms of sustainability governance (chiefly but not solely of state actors) goes beyond the constituencies defined by political convention, to virtually encompass all of humanity (in a geographically and temporally omni-inclusive sense), and arguably all of "our Common Home" (Laudato Si', 2015). This learning, together with non-learning-related triggers (e.g. environmental or economic shocks), lead to emergence; and emergence has a loosening effect on structures, thus augmenting the margin of

maneuver for transformative agency (Raskin, 2008), which can then be harnessed effectively through governance.

This allows to put the picture together of how agency, structure, contingent situation, and meaning/learning fit together into a single theory of transformations: while structure and agency shape each other (in the classical sense of the structure-agency dualism) in a given spatiotemporal context, emergent phenomena tend to loosen unsustainable, locked-in structures, giving transformative agency an extra point of leverage over structure. This dialectical process feeds back positively into collective learning processes pushing this whole relational system towards a transformed system-structure beyond the boundaries of current contingencies. (see Figure 19)

Figure 19: overview of collective learning in the broader picture of a theory of social-ecological transformations



Through our analysis of discursive representations, especially those in the GT debate, insights could be gained into macro-structural constraints to a social-ecological transformation, and how transformative agency can, in some cases, unlock, loosen, or circumvent such constraints through para-governance interventions. Let us try and synthetize these insights, classified into three categories of macro-structural constraints: political, material, and cultural.

On the *political* front, we have identified various problematic aspects which could be grouped in two polarized alternatives underpinning the same lock-in of politics, which we called 'technocratic managerialism' and 'democratic optimism'. The depoliticizing effect of technocratic-managerial views of governance, which cling either on the administrative logic of 'command and control' or on the logic of utility maximization of so-called market regulation, has a hitherto failed to deliver the historical burden of proof in bending global evolutionary trajectories toward pathways compatible with sustainable human life on earth. Given the stakes and the tight time-window available to accomplish such transformation, it can no longer be the preferred approach to sustainability governance: after four decades of virtually uncontested discursive dominance worldwide with intensifying and accelerating degradation trends in the Earth System, techno-managerial approaches deserve careful scrutiny, rather than blind credence.

However, democratizing enthusiasts setting their hopes on improved stakeholder participation should be cautioned against the pitfalls of deliberative mechanisms in the face of ever-increasing factual complexity and cultural pluralism (H. Rosa, 2010, 2016a), on the one hand, and against the risk of liberal consumer democracies turning into reactionary defenders of their 'imperial way of life' against outsiders (Brand & Wissen, 2017), thus leading to a post-ecologist "politics of simulation" where both political elites and their constituencies are tacit accomplices in a "performance of seriousness", which, no matter how bombastic the transformative rhetoric, is aimed at "sustaining the unsustainable" for as long as possible. (Blühdorn, 2007)

Empirical evidence appears to support this hypothesis of simulative politics: according to a recently published study from an Oxford research group (Pfeiffer, Millar, Hepburn, & Beinhocker, 2016), in order to get a fifty percent chance of attaining the politically agreed climate goal of limiting global average temperature increase to 2° Celsius, no new fossil-fuel-based energy plants can be constructed as of immediately, unless endowed with potent carbon sequestration mechanisms making them emissions-neutral. Furthermore, even if all 150 signatories of the celebrated Paris Agreement of 2015 would eventually honor their Nationally Determined Contributions to curb carbon emissions (which given current trends seems extremely unlikely), the global aggregate energy demand would raise by 32% and CO2 emissions by 15%, resulting in average atmospheric warming of 2,7°, well above the set goal (International Energy Agency, 2015). But limiting the problem to energy provision alone would also be misleading: the burning of fossil fuels accounts only for 70% of global anthropogenic emissions, while the required reduction, to stay within the 2°C guardrail, would be of 80% until 2050. Indeed, the problem lies not only in which type of energy is consumed, but for what purposes it is

consumed (Hickel, 2016a). The unattainability of the climate goals under current governance mechanisms is manifest, yet the Paris Agreement was unanimously praised as the "best *possible*" deal. Noteworthily, Blühdorn's thesis challenges the widespread cleavage pitting (evil) 'elites' against (benevolent) 'ordinary people'. Indeed, the diagnoses of "lack of political will" or "corrupt governments" at the service of "vested interests", while surely overall justified, are excessively simplistic and inexpedient: such diagnoses foster but messianic hopes for societies to make "the right choice" when electing their political decision-makers, and bend the focus of politics onto an obsessive preoccupation with the moral quality of public officials, while obscuring the deeply entrenched social and political dynamics underneath. Indeed: even *willing* political elites would be unable to resist the self-stabilization pressures in the face of a divided electorate (i.e. fragmented and contradictory citizen interests), on the one hand, and the necessary trade-off between governability (i.e. consensus-building) and transformative efficacy, on the other, as is perfectly illustrated with the case of the *hybrid Buen vivir* (cf. Chapter 5). These political dilemmas are reinforced by the material blockers described below, which, given the short electoral cycles, push governments to indefinitely postponing the uncomfortable consequences of effective action (Blühdorn, 2007; Streeck, 2013). (cf. Section 7.1, this chapter).

Messianic hopes (be it in political leaders or in 'technological miracles') lead to social immobility and trump prospects for the mainstreaming of a para-governance approach to the social-ecological transformation.

Hence democracy, depending on its particular configuration, can be as much part of the problem as it can be part of the solution to the unsustainability lock-in: as long as emancipation means liberation from ecological and social constraints, democratic paths towards a SET will remain locked. Democracy will not bring about sustainability as long as there is no (para-governed) substantial transformation of Western consumer culture.

We did identify potential para-governance remedies for these dilemmas, however: Dryzek's conception of discursive representation instead of the classical majorities-representation of liberal democracy potentially offers a way out of "simulative politics" by giving TDs a greater weight in (sub)political life, feeding back positively, through the expansion of identity-boundaries, into the emergence of transformative agency. Also put forward by Dryzek, Castells, Bauwens, among others, are network-conceptions of a proxy-polity, such as peer-to-peer polyarchic-democratic configuations (Bauwens, 2012b) a "network society" as a polity displacing the conventional *demos* (Castells, 2000), thus dismantling territorial-based 'imperial' socio-economic relations and creating new spaces for

identity generation and adscription. The creation of socio-ecological "commitment devices" in the sense of A. Offer and T. Jackson (2009a) would structurally constrain available options for myopic, self-destructive collective or individual behavior, yet it would require a shift in the normative engagement of the state, confronting prejudices of "totalitarian interventions" towards co-producing the social world.

Yet political room for maneuver is tightly constrained, as we learned also through *Buen vivir*, due to *material* or *economic* constraints. Jackson clearly lays out the dilemma of the conflicted state, which regardless of its transformative will, remains structurally dependent on economic growth to sustain the service of debt (insofar compound interest and the intricate system of financial derivatives continue to drive an exponential increase in debt that needs to be compensated) and keep unemployment rates under control (compensating for the loss to automation and labor-productivity increases).

Similarly, individual business entrepreneurs may be willing to pursue broader objectives than mere economic profit (Scholl & Mewes, 2015); yet, from a systemic perspective, the imperative of capital-rentability maximization in a capitalist economy means that capitalist businesses have an inbuilt externalization drive setting economic actors into a 'race to the bottom' to reduce production costs, which will eventually and inevitably either confine 'ethical business' to economic niches (relying on a consumer-base able and willing to pay overprices to compensate for higher costs of production) or drive them back into the unsustainable mainstream (Latouche, 2009). This seems an irremediable dead end from a governance perspective: Indeed, "the organization of the totality of the economy towards a 'better' life has become the main enemy of a *good* life". (Illich, 1973, p. 118)

What para-governance options are available to escape the economic dimension of the unsustainability lock-in? A "politics of sufficiency" at the meso-level could be help creating the cultural preconditions to rallying people behind a process of macro-economic redesign towards sustainable degrowth, through the fostered emergence of plural economies beyond capitalism, as well as decentralized and local money-systems and other forms of currency (e.g. time banks). A decisive para-governance intervention in this regard would be fostering the debate around the ownership of the emerging infrastructure of the Internet of Things (IoT), which, according the representations lumped here together under the rubric of "P2P Society", could potentially enable a wholesale transition from capitalism to the "collaborative commons" as the dominant economic system of the 21st century, embedded in a "network society". Rifkin (2014, p. 138) eloquently points out the uniqueness of the

historical window of opportunity now opening towards a Polanyian-scale whole-societal transformation:

The IoT is the first general purpose technology platform in history that can potentially take large parts of the economy to near zero marginal costs [by enabling 'prosumers' to produce most of the material artifacts they require almost for free, thus radically democratizing the ownership of the means of production, as happened with immaterial goods through the advent of the communications internet]. And that's what makes the marginal cost controversy so pivotal to humanity's future. Whether the new potential inherent in the IoT infrastructure can be realized will be determined by who finances the platform. The struggle for control is already well underway, mostly behind the scenes, in regulatory commissions, courtrooms, legislatures, corporate boardrooms, civil society organizations, and academic circles all over the world. As of yet, only snippets of the discussion have bubbled up to public consciousness. That is likely to change in the next few years as a younger generation squares off with itself on what kind of economic future it favors.

Lastly, structural hindrances of *cultural* nature include, as per our analysis, change-blockers such as a social "status competition", a behaviorist policy mindset, a monistic conception of modernity and of the good life, a pragmatist cultural bias, the dogmatic character of themes such as GDP growth-orientation of the political economy or a territorial re-localization of most economic activity; or, conversely, the tabooed character of sufficiency as a political-cultural project. On the opposite pole of the ideological spectrum, romanticized views and hopes about 'insular' alternatives being upscalable up to the point of triggering a systemic shift (as in the "Indigenist BV") appear equally misleading. Indeed:

It seems quite possible that *millions* of people could embrace voluntary simplicity, vegetarianism, recycling, downshifting […] or ecovillage living […] without making a dent in the ongoing expansion of global societal metabolism and GDP. (Paulson, 2017, p. 435)

An incipient shift in meaning-structures can be observed with the introduction of concepts such as Brand & Wissen's "imperial ways of life" challenging the logic of 'global development', the 'good life' as opposed to 'better life' (Acosta, 2010a; Illich, 1973), "enjoyable limits" (Schneidewind et al., 2013), as well as the introduction of revulsive frame-carriers (as we saw with the narratives of conservative contraction and P2P society in the GT debate). The holistic forms of knowing and relating, the celebrative (as opposed to rationalist-utilitarian) ethos of BV, and the collectivistic imagination

superseding individual 'lifestyle choice' offer similar potential, but all these endeavors would need a more massive, systematic, and deliberate engagement – that is, para-governance – in order to feed serious societal debate and cultural agonism. Table 19 summarizes the structural hindrances and the para-governance enablers at the macro-level just discussed.

Table 19: Macro-level structural lock-ins and corresponding para-governance enablers

	Structural lock-ins	Para-governance enablers
Political	- De-politization and naturalization of technocratic/ managerial views of governance - Crisis of democracy and politics (simulative politics)	- Discursive democracy - Networks as polity (combinations of polyarchic and democratic structures) - Social commitment devices
Material	- Structural dependence of finance and labor on sustained economic growth	- politics of sufficiency, - plural economies, - sustainable degrowth, - collaborative commons.
Cultural	- Narrative of 'global development' - status competition - behaviorist policy mindset - monistic ontologies - pragmatist bias, - dogmatic character of key-leverage issues (growth-orientation, sufficiency, re-localization) - Romanticized hopes about 'insular' lifestyle alternatives	- imperial ways of life, - good life as opposed to 'better life', - enjoyable limits, - revulsive frame-brokers (e.g. CC and P2P as frame brokers in GT debate) - Holistic form of knowing and relating, celebrative ethos of BV

A derived discussion pits the above implicit supposition that society, as a meta-system, is amenable to wholesale change, in the first place, against two variants of rationalist theorizing that we have been arguing against, in a more or less explicit fashion: first, the Rational Choice approach so popular in policy as well as in the academia; and, secondly, the System-theory of Niklas Luhmann.

A Lumannite analysis would conclude that the super-system society is incapable of understanding itself as a totality, and correspondingly also to generate solutions at the level of the system as a whole. The rational choice approach, in turn, sees individual choice as autopoietic and society as an aggregate of individual agents, thus setting the *tout court* explanatory focus for any change at the level of individuals (driven by immaterial attitudes and beliefs or by material interests). The first rules out micro-foundations of social change; the latter rules out macro-foundations.

While from the perspective of enabling sustainability transitions the RC approach has a sorry record, yielding paradoxical value-action gaps, Luhmann's systems-approach might be, to some extent at least, upheld in its own terms, as accurately describing the working-mechanisms of complex, functionally differentiated modern societies. Yet it also has a naturalizing, self-fulfilling prophecy performativity: it describes well the social reality it reproduces itself.

Instead, the prospect of a social-ecological transformation demands – hence the word – a *trans-formation* of society in its mutually reinforcing unsustainable sub-systemic feedback loops abundantly described throughout this dissertation. The self-referential mechanisms and pressures of societal sub-systems described by Luhmann are much alive and kicking, but they can and need to be challenged (Unger, 2004).

The genocidal totalitarian experiences of the 20th century have rightly made us reluctant to think of the possibility of steered whole-societal change experiments. Yet in the context of the geostorical challenges of the Anthropocene, an antithetic moment to the rationalist and Luhmannite ontologies is urgently needed. But fostered transformative learning presents a non-necessitarian, non-rationalistic alternative: one that looks at systemic interrelations, as well, but not as a mechanistic totality: an alternative metaphor is that of the social system as an ecosystem (Blühdorn, 2011; Wright, 2013).

In an ecosystem, interdependence is as important as for Luhmann, but interactions are more complex, open, and transversal, thereby trumping the assumption of autopoietic closure. This ecosystemic backbone opens up new possibilities for imagining societal change. Indeed, an ecosystem might be transformed by the introduction of an alien species that initially develops within a niche and gradually displaces certain other species, reconstituting the dynamics, structures and functions of the whole ecosystem (Wright, 2013, p. 9). Similarly, this is the logic of a 'critical yeast' (Lederach, 2003) offers an alternative not only to the Luhmannite system-logic, but also to that of the critical mass implicit in rational choice.

7.3. Closing remarks

Under the title "The futures we want", the World Forum of Sociology 2016 of the International Sociological Association (ISA) urged the discipline to become a "forward-oriented sociology, on the pertinent trends, risks, and opportunities of our time, on scenarios of probable, possible, preventable, or preferable futures"[241]. A kindred future-orientation – now with socio-ecological sustainability explicitly at the center – is strongly advocated by the International Social Science Council (ISSC) in the World Social Science Report 2013. (Hackmann & Moser, 2013a)

Sustainability (governance) research in the social sciences hitherto clustered around three major topical areas: the analysis of collective action (the study of environmental social movements); of institutions (state politics and environmental policy formation, or else the relationship between consumption and production institutions), or else of social-psychological behavioral drivers (environmental attitudes, beliefs and values). Complementary topics are the role of technology in social and environmental change, and issues of spatial scale – chiefly the significance of 'the global' in terms of 'environmental scale' and institutions (Hannigan, 2006, p. 12). Common to these approaches is that conventional assumptions about the *who* and the *how* of change are hardly ever problematized, be it regarding the role of both individual and collective agency (rationalist, naturalist, behaviorist assumptions) or the structural (functionalist assumptions) and dynamic mechanisms of social change (top-down vs. bottom-up dichotomy).

In addition, the dualist focus on either a normative macro-critique of industrialism and capitalism – dominant in the 1970s and 1980s (Hannigan, 2006) and resurging in the wake of the 'Great Recession' during the last decade (Brand, 2014a) – or else a descriptive/ ethnographic account of localized, concrete, visible, and measurable socio-environmental entanglements. The importance of *real* or *concrete utopias* for a fundamental social-ecological transformation as an area of study and cultural-political action has been thereby largely neglected.

This dissertation sought to contribute to filling in the above gaps. To this end, it built on a bold double-register: On the one hand, a well-delimited focus of observation allowing for a methodologically rigorous study, namely on network-based discursive interaction dynamics in spatiotemporally situated debates. Particular attention was payed to the dynamic roles and practices and to the structural configurations of agency at play in producing mainly two types of effects: first, discursive pluralization, and second, the emergence of new discursive articulations around social-

[241] Source: http://futureswewant.net/about/; accessed on 24.03.2017

ecological utopias transcending the purview of mainstream sustainability governance and sustainable development discussions. Yet, on the other hand, while narrowing down its focus for analytical precision, our research interest taps into a horizon of change that pertains "huge structures, enormous comparisons", as Charles Tilly advocates, and is thus conceived of as a building block towards an overarching theory to support the historically unprecedented, global task to deliberately advance a Polanyian-scale transformation towards sustainability. In *geostorical* times, such double register arguably becomes a sine qua non condition for inquiry in the domain of sustainability and sustainability governance. That this sort of approach has been marginalized in the social sciences over decades is inimical to the challenges facing societies worldwide.

But this research also offers orientation to cultural and political action. By addressing the issue of sustainability governance from the perspective of collective learning and discursive change, this research endeavor seeks to open new avenues for understanding 'sustained unsustainability' that go beyond dominant yet sterile rationalist explanations such as the so-called 'value-action gap', and illuminate pathways forward towards effective, transformative interventions. The re-habilitation of the concept of *real utopia* is intended to work against the self-censorship of imagination that permeates mainstream current political culture in addressing sustainability issues. Our inquiry delivered insights and raised questions about different narratives of socially desirable change, associated ways of life, and alternative socio-economic, technological and governance systems.

In order to best condense the overall insights gained through this dissertation, I will arrange them according to the three classical levels of social analysis involved, and their reciprocal imbrications.

Our journey began by theoretically exploring the elasticity of classical agency-based theories of social change in accounting for micro-level agency driving process of transformational social learning and change, establishing the dilemmas of the "conflicted agent" and the "missing agent" as structural predicaments constraining agency. In order to find out how agency can overcome its own restrictions towards an enhanced transformative potential, we investigated two situated, ongoing processes of radical discursive contestation around social-ecological utopias as a proxy to transformative learning.

Although our focus of observation was geared towards heterogeneous networks of deliberation and collective action spanning across society, the strong presence of (larger clusters of) organizations and institutional platforms, concentrated our attention broadly at the meso-level of analysis. Looking at the repertoires of both practices and representations at play in these debates, we gained insights into how the predicament of micro-level agency is sorted out through forms of *subrogatory* and *hybrid* agency, enabled through (material) institutional support structures, such as cultural diffraction mechanisms

for (socially non-punitive) alternative identification and subjectivation opportunities, or combinations of material shielding and leverage to preserve the above repository of cultural biodiversity, and the capacity to expand its influence across the 'social ecosystem'. Data supporting these findings came mostly from the analysis of discursive practice.

But both the data – now especially at the level of representation – and state-of-the-art literature revealed the superordinate constraints weighting over transformative agency and transformational learning operating at the macro level: we reviewed cultural, material, and political factors locking-in current development trajectories, thus trivializing much of the efforts attempted at lower levels.

Even though researching these macro-level constraints was not supported by the research design as it fell beyond the scope of this research, putting the problematization of the trilogy *agency-learning-transformation* into a macro-perspective appeared necessary to gain a holistic understanding of the blockades facing the required societal changes, and the implications thereof for sustainability governance. We thus found that the convergence of micro- and macro-level predicaments of transformative agency unambiguously points at a *cul-de-sac* of the concept of governance itself. While an improved governance remains crucial to manage mitigation and adaptation to the unprecedented challenges of the Anthropocene, it appears inherently incapable of paving the way towards the transformation of human societies into more resilient ones, into societies capable of "organizing the unplannable" and of standing up to the "unmanageable that is unavoidable". This acknowledgement led to the conceptual-theoretical innovation of para-governance as an alternative (largely conflicting) logic and empirical complement to governance.

As a deliberate facilitation of the creation of preconditions for transformative learning, para-governance deliberately undermines quick and painless but ultimately incongruous cultural and political fusions, and channels creative energies towards creating preconditions for the 'right fusions', instead. The versatility of the concept of para-governance for addressing the macro-level lock-ins hampering effective sustainability governance was then proto-tested, simultaneously outlining possible avenues for future research.

Transformative collective learning and para-governance appear as a powerful complement to more established analyses of the global situation developed in the scholarly fields of environmental sociology, political ecology, ecological economics, or science and technology studies, as well as cultural studies, critical geography, and indigenous studies. The para-governance framework links critical conversations in these fields with momentous developments in socio-natural life, including mounting worldwide struggles for social justice, environmental sustainability, and non-relativist cultural

pluralism, as well as worrisome further and accelerated deterioration of the conditions of stability of the Earth system that human societies have taken for granted and relied on throughout all of history. Para-governance, I argue, is the call of the hour if sustainability governance is to improve its effectiveness in addressing geostorical challenges. If the Anthropocene and the derived transformation imperative are taken seriously while unprecedented humanitarian catastrophe appears still avoidable, transformational social learning needs to be brought to the center of any sustainability strategy. Without mainstreaming of a para-governance approach, transformative agency will hardly attain the critical mass to make "the politically impossible become the politically inevitable".

The greatest hindrance in embracing para-governance may just lie in the misplaced hope awarded to what by now should be manifestly regarded as an illusory, compensatory utopia of attaining a socially and ecologically responsible social order under the aegis of the capitalist-industrialist matrix. Clinging on compensatory utopias rather than harnessing the potential lurking in "real utopias" implies the depletion of humanity's most valuable but also scarcest resource: social energy for transformative change.

Para-governance remains a normative proposal, however, in a world where "pathways of collective unlearning" have the upper hand, at least in the politics of a global industrialist-capitalist system set into a runaway collision course with ecological planetary boundaries. To be sure, however, the multi-centric and pluralist world which will characterize the 21st century, whose contours are already visible, together with the major socio-environmental disruptions already in the pipeline, offer fertile ground for more radical learning. In a world set on course of exponential growth of private wealth, exponential learning curves are urgently required. A kind of learning that overturns the Hegelian conception according to which we can only learn what is already known (Rehbein 2010, 2013) – i.e. that all we can learn necessarily has to draw on the existing stock of ideas and actions, thereby negating the 'surplus of possibility' lurking in the space of societal non-existence referred to by Butler and Sousa Santos. It is by drawing on these repositories that it becomes possible for society to lift itself above the constraints of its current symbolic order. Critically for this dissertation, this implies the possibility of a form of learning which gives place to the generation of true alternatives – better, as Santos puts it: of "alternative ways of looking at alternatives" – to the ecologically and socially unsustainable Western-mirrored symbolic and normative horizon reflected in the currently prevailing world order.

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ANNEX 1. Main data corpus for the analysis of the GT discourse as field of representation

Text N°.	Author	Title
1	Acosta, Alberto	Buen Vivir. Vom Recht auf ein gutes Leben
2	Adler / Schachtschneider (Alain Lipietz / Wuppertal Institut)	Green New Deal, Suffizienz oder Ökosozialismus
3	Adler / Schachtschneider (Bennholdt-Thomsen / von Werlhof)	Green New Deal, Suffizienz oder Ökosozialismus
4	Adler / Schachtschneider (Biesecker)	Green New Deal, Suffizienz oder Ökosozialismus
5	Adler / Schachtschneider (Marko Ferst)	Green New Deal, Suffizienz oder Ökosozialismus
6	Adler / Schachtschneider (Martin Jänicke / Joseph Huber)	Green New Deal, Suffizienz oder Ökosozialismus
7	Adler / Schachtschneider (Paech / Binswanger / Wuppertal Institut)	Green New Deal, Suffizienz oder Ökosozialismus
8	Adler / Schachtschneider (Rainer Land)	Green New Deal, Suffizienz oder Ökosozialismus
9	Adler / Schachtschneider (Robert Kurz)	Green New Deal, Suffizienz oder Ökosozialismus
10	Adler / Schachtschneider (Sarkar / Bruno Kern)	Green New Deal, Suffizienz oder Ökosozialismus
11	Adler / Schachtschneider (Ulrich Beck)	Green New Deal, Suffizienz oder Ökosozialismus
12	Adler / Schachtschneider (Ulrich Brand / Christoph Görg)	Green New Deal, Suffizienz oder Ökosozialismus
13	Assadourian, Erik	Wachstum im Überfluss
14	Biesecker, Adelheid / Hofmeister, Sabine	(Re)Produktivität als Kategorie Vorsorgendes Wirtschaften
15	Birch, Eugenie / Lynch, Amy	Ist nachhaltige Stadtentwicklung messbar?
16	Borries, von Friedrich	Zehn Thesen für die Stadt von morgen
17	BUND; Brot für die Welt, Wuppertal Institut	Zukunftfähiges Deutschland
18	Daly, Herman	Steady State Economy (http://www.theoildrum.com/pdf/theoildrum_3941.pdf)

19	Diefenbacher, Hans	Szenario Arbeitswelt
20	Ekins, Paul	Wie wird die Welt von morgen sein?
21	Etzioni, Amitai	Eine nue Charakterisierung des guten Lebens
22	Exner, Andreas /Lauk, Christian	Das Wachstum des Kapitals
23	Fatheuer, Thomas	Buen Vivir - Recht auf gutes Leben
24	Fücks, Ralf	Intelligent Wachsen
25	Global Scenario Group	Great Transition
26	Gudynas, Eduardo	Buen Vivir: Today's tomorrow
27	Habermann, Friederike	Ecommony
28	Hahlbrock, Klaus	Szenario Ernährung
29	Haug, Frigga	Arbeit jenseits von Wachstum
30	Höpflinger, Francois	Alterssicherungssysteme: Doppelte Herausforderung von demografischer Alterung und Postwachstum
31	Hopkins, Rob	Transition Town
32	ISM	Sozialökologischer Umbau
33	Ivanova, Maria	Autorität, Ressourcen, Vernetzung - Woraus eine neue Umwelt-Governance entsteht
34	Jackson, Tim	Wohlstand ohne Wachstum
35	Kemfert, Claudia	Szenario Energie
36	Lachenmayer, Jan /Maier, Timo (Johannes Heinrichs)	Demokratie - Ein Auslfug ins Mögliche
37	Latouche, Serge	Farewell to growth
38	Leggewie, Claus	2050: Die demokratische Frage heute
39	LINKSFRAKTION	Plan B (https://www.plan-b-mitmachen.de/?page_id=399)
40	Massarat, Mohssen	Die Viertagewoche
41	Messner, Dirk	Drei Wellen globalen Wandels
42	Miegel, Meinhard	Exit! Wachstum ohne Wohlstand
43	Mikfeld, Benjamin	Alte und neue Wege aus der großen Krise
44	NEF	Great Transition
45	Paech, Niko	Vom grünen Wachstumsmythos zur Postwachstumsökonomie
46	Paech, Niko (2012)	Befreiung vom Überfluss
47	Schmelzer, Matthias / Passadakis, Alexis	Postwachstum
48	Pennekamp, Johannes (Binswanger)	Wohlstand ohne Wachstum - Ein Literaturüberblick
49	Pennekamp, Johannes (Peter Victor)	Wohlstand ohne Wachstum - Ein Literaturüberblick

50	Rammler, Stephan	Die Geschichte der Zukunft unserer Mobilität
51	Rat für nachhaltige Entwicklung	Visionen 2050
52	Rätz, Werner et. al.	Statt Verdammung "Falscher" Bedürfnisse: Demokratische Debatte über Inhalt und Gestalt der Produktion
53	Felber, Christian	Die Gemeinwohl-Ökonomie
54	Renner, Michael	Green Economy - eine Antwort auf die Krise?
55	Reuter, Norbert	Der Arbeitsmarkt im Spannungsfeld von Wachstum, Ökologie und Verteilung
56	Ropke, Inge	Konsum: Der Kern des Wachstumsmotors
57	Schneider, Francois et. al.	Crisis or opportunity? Econic degrowth for social equity and ecological sustainability. Introduction to this special issue
58	Schor, Juliet	Plenitude
59	Stratmann-Mertens, Eckhard	Schrumpfung statt Wachstum
60	Ulvila, Marko / Parsanen, Jana	Sustainable Futures
61	WBSCD	Visionen 2050
62	White, Allen / Baraldi, Monica	Visionen, Prinzipien, Veränderungen - Wie sich Unternehmen neu erfinden können
63	Bündnis 90/ Die Grünen	Green new Deal 2011
64	SPD	So wollen wir leben!
65	Felder et al (ver.di, Greenpeace & Attac)	Sozial-ökologischer Umbau als Projekt von Gewerkschaften und sozialen Bewegungen.
66	IG Metall / IG BCE	Qualitatives Wachstum für gute Arbeit und eine gerechte Gesellschaft
67	Weizsäcker, Ernst Ulrich von	WOYNOWSKY ET AL
68	Braungart, Michael	WOYNOWSKY ET AL
69	Hiss, Christian	WOYNOWSKY ET AL
70	Peukert, Helge	WOYNOWSKY ET AL
71	Paqué, Karl Heinz	Wachstum! Die Zukunft des globalen Kapitalismus
72	WBGU	Climate protection as a world citizens movement
73	WBGU	Gesellschaftlicher Vertrag für eine Große Transformation
74	Schneidewind & Zahrnt	Damit gutes Leben einfacher wird. Perspektiven einer Suffizienzpolitik
75	Reisch	Zeit für Nachhaltigkeit – Zeiten der Transformation

76	Muraca	Gut Leben. Eine Gesellschaft jenseits des Wachstums
77	Welzer & Sommer	Transformationsdesign Wege in eine zukunftsfähige Moderne
78	Unmüßig, B., Sachs, W., & Fatheuer	Critique of the Green Economy Toward Social and Environmental Equity
79	Andreae et al (INSM)	Die Grüne Marktwirtschaft – Wege zum nachhaltigen Wachstum
80	Misereor	Weltgemeinwohl. Neue Ansätze zu Postwachstum und sozialer Gerechtigkeit
81	Adloff & Leggewie	Das konvivialistische Manifest
82	Asara et al 2015	Socially sustainable degrowth as a social–ecological transformation: repoliticizing sustainability
83	UNEP	Towards a Green Economy
84	OECD	Towards Green Growth
85	Bauwens, Michael	Blueprint for P2P Society: The Partner State & Ethical Economy
86	Rifkin, Jeremy	The Zero Marginal Cost Society
87	Mason, Paul	Postcapitalism: A guide to our future

ANNEX 2: Sample 2. List of selected texts for the analysis of GT as field of discursive practice

Text N°.	Author	Title
1	Adloff	Das Konvivialistische Manifest. Einleitung der deutschen Fassung
2	Brand, U	Degrowth: Der Beginn einer Bewegung?
3	Brand, U., Pühl, K., & Thimmel, S.	Wohlstand -wie anders?
4	Brie, M.	Futuring: Perspektiven der Transformation im Kapitalismus über ihn hinaus
5	Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland, Brot für die Welt, & Wuppertal Instituts für Klima, Umwelt, Energie	Zukunftsfähiges Deutschland in einer globalisierten Welt: ein Anstoss zur gesellschaftlichen Debatte
6	Deutscher Bundestag	Schlussbericht der Enquete-Kommission „Wachstum, Wohl-stand, Lebensqualität – Wege zu nachhaltigem Wirtschaften und gesellschaftlichem Fortschritt in der Sozialen Marktwirtschaft“
7	Ecornet	Verstehen – Bewerten – Gestalten
8	Felder, C. et. Al	Sozial-ökologischer Umbau als Projekt von Gewerkschaften und sozialen Bewegungen.
9	Friedrich Ebert Stiftung	So wollen wir leben! Ideen und Handlungsempfehlungen aus dem Fortschrittsforum
10	Germanwatch	The Great Transformation
11	Germanwatch	International conference Dialogue on Transformation/Regional Meeting
12	Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)	Transformation: Den großen Wandel mitgestalten
13	Homer-Dixon, T.	The Great Transformation: Climate Change as Cultural Change. Keynote Speech.
14	Leinfelder, R., & Pilardeaux, B.	Der WBGU-Comic: Die Große Transformation: Der WBGU und das Transformationsgutachten

15	Misereor, & IHS.	Weltgemeinwohl_Neue Ansätze zu Postwachstum und globaler Gerechtigkeit (Welt Sichten)
16	Reisch, L. A., & Bietz, S.	Zeit für Nachhaltigkeit – Zeiten der Transformation: Elemente einer Zeitpolitik für die gesellschaftliche Transformation zu nachhaltigeren Lebensstilen
17	von Jorck, G.	Konzepte und Leitbilder sozial-ökologischer Transformation
18	WBGU	Climate Protection as a World Citizen Movement Special Report

ANNEX 3: Sample 2: Theoretical criteria used for sampling (adapted from Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 31)

Data source	identify new leads of importance	extend the area of information	relate or bridge already existing elements	accounts for/ reinforce the already known	Convenience /condensed info	exemplify or provide evidence for an important theme	confirm/ disconfirm	adds diversity to sample	critical instance/ actor	COMMENTS
P 2: Adloff & Leggewie_2014_Das Konvivialistische Manifest	x	x	x				x	x		Consensus-portrait of the foundational principles for a GT by a large and heterogeneous group of intellectuals, drawing on convivialism as a political-philosophical approach. Draws on French influences, mainly, and summarizes the discourse of this collective actor.
P 3: Bausetelle Zukunft_Transformation_Flachsland_Edenhofer_Auf_mehreren_Ebenen_agieren	x	x					x	x		Represents the discourse on transformation (respective volume in Polititische Ökologie) from mainstream climate science, embodied here by Ottmar Edenhofer
P 4: Brand_degrowth_birth of a movement	x	x	x	x	x		x			describes the dynamics of movement-building stemming from the degrowth debate, linking it to the GT debate
P 5: Brand et al_2013_Wohlstand - wie anders	x	x		x	x		x			This document provides reflections and insights about the working dynamics of the Enquette WWL
P 6: Brie_2014_Futuring_Brie (Vorwort)	x		x		x		x			on the emergence of the concepts of transformation and transition, in Germany and beyond.
P 6: Brie_2014_Futuring_Reißig		x	x		x		x			Noteworthy the theoretical reflections of Brand and others about transformation as a specific type of societal change, as well as its characterization.
P 6: Brie_2014_Futuring_Brand		x	x	x	x		x			Brand goes deeper into the analysis of the GT debate, expanding and complementing the data of P5 (Brand et al-2013-Wohlstand- wie anders) about the dynamics of the Enquette WWL
P 7: BUND et al_2009_Zukunftfähiges Deutschland ZDII-Summary		x							x	Significant publication for its penetration level, released by flagship organizations in the development and environment sectors. Updates the influential 1996 Report, showing the evolution in discourse and linking it to current (deemed failed) responses of German politics to the multiple crisis
P 8: Deutscher Bundestag_Enquette Kommission WWL_Schlussbericht						x			x	Key event in the GT debate genealogy, as pointed out in a multiplicity of sources. Mainstreamed the concept of "socio-ecological transformation" and brought the debate out of niches onto the political agenda
P 9: Die Linke_2012_Plan B_das rote projekt für einen sozial ökologischen Umbau						x			x	Official position paper of DIE LINKE parlamentary block on the GT
P10: Ecornet, FONA_2012_Sozial-ökologische Forschung-Memorandum	x	x	x	x	x		x			Memorandum and position paper by one of the central networks in the politics of science regarding research on socio-ecological transformation. Gives an overview of the recent history of the field.
P11: Felder et al._Sozialökologischer Umbau als projekt von gewerkschaften und socialen bewegungen	x		x	x		x	x		x	Interesting crossover paper published jointly by an unlikely alliance: Attac, ver.di, and Greenpeace. Provides insight into the dynamics of an emerging and striking discourse coalition, and reflects the resulting consensus in terms of GT representation
P12: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung_2013_so wollen wir leben_fortschrittsforum						x			x	Represents the voice of a "middleman" in the political field, who moved from the opposition to the government coalition.
P13: Germanwatch_Dialogue on Transformation conference report		x		x	x	x	x			This conference report serves as a condensed collection of utterances by a great number and variety of CSOs in the development and environment sector.
P14: Germanwatch_The Great Transformation_Weitblick Magazin		x	x	x	x					Gives a more "personal" insight into the discourse of the German development sector through one of its flagship organizations. The magazine format signals also the diffussion of the GT to a wider public
P15: GiZ_2012-transformation								x		Voice of the biggest German statal development organization, which is therefore subject to political juncture. GT features only marginally here -maybe mainly through the cooptation of the term 'transformation'- , but the actor is a must.

P16: Heinrich Böll Stiftung_2007_gruene_Marktwirtschaft_grosse Transformation		x					x	x		Represents the voice of the "Realos" faction in the German Greeens
P17: Heinrich Böll Stiftung_2014_foerderschwerpunkt-transformationsforschung clusters			x	x		x				Represents a material impact of the GT discourse: a new funding line of the Heinrich-Böll Stiftung on SET
P18: Homer-Dixon_The Great Transformation conference Essen_June 2009_Keynote	x			x	x		x			"Foreplay" to the GT debate in 2009! Homer-Dixon displays the essential contents of the GT debate here, supporting my case for the originality of this debate and for the presence of counter-systemic elements structuring the debate.
P19: INSM_Die Wohlstandsfrage	x							x		Reaction of the business sector to the GT debate.
P20: Institut Solidarische Moderne_2011_Sozialoekologischer_Gesellschaftsumbau	x	x			x					Think tank which offers one of the most comprehensive elaborations on SET available.
P21: Klein_Das Morgen tanzt im heute	x	x	x	x	x		x	x		Shows how LINKE and RLS have taken up the banner of the GT from the beginning, and not only elaborate on their own views, but engage most thoroughly with that of others as well (see scenarios in ch. 4). It also addresses issues of power and cooptation in chapter 3.
P22: Kristof_Erfolgreiche Wege zum Wandel			x	x		x		x	x	Represents the voice of the State bzw. UBA
P23: Misereor_2013_Welt_Sichten_Weltgemeinwohl	x	x	x	x	x		x	x		One of the key religious organizations in the German development sector. This document illustrates the discourse of Misereor on the GT and gives new and interesting overview ingights into the GT debate.
P24: Ober_Forschungswende für die Große Transformation	x			x		x				One of the great materializations of the GT discourse in the field of politics of science
P25: Öko-Institut_2015_Shaping the future							x		x	Anual report 2014 by one of the key players in non-university sustainability science in Germany, who was the pioneer of the Energiewende
P26: Reisch_Zeit für Nachhaltigkeit, Zeit für Transformation	x		x					x		Presents the realm of (UBA-sponsored)Time-politics as an intense arena for the debate on a GT, in connection with the goal of a good life ("Zeitpolitik der/für die Transformation"). Provides rich insights into time-relevant instances of the GT debate.
P27: Schneidewind & Zahrnt_2014_The politics of sufficiency		x	x	x		x	x			Coalition science (Schneidewind/Wuppertal Institute) -civil society (Zahrnt/BUND), breaking down the usually abstract vision on sufficiency into concrete policy proposals, thereby pointing to component elements of the GT and their respective arenas of discussion
P28: Siebenhüner et al_Unternehmen_Teilhabe and einer nachhaltigen Gesellschaft_GELENA WP	x						x	x		Complements corpus with a reflection on the role of Business by a leading ecological economist in the framework of a SÖF project
P29: SPD_2012_fortschrittsprogramm							x		x	Complement to the SPD/FES document in Sample A
P30: Stelleauschreibung Brot für die Welt			x	x	x	x				Materialization of GT discourse: BfdW creates a position of "Referent für SET" and outlines the field of debate
P31: Streeck_2011_The crisis in context	x				x			x		Insight into the international and local context in which the GT debate emerged by a radical thinker heading mainstream Max-Planck Institute for the Study of Societies
P32: Unmüssig, Sachs and Fatheuer_2012_Critique of the Green Economy			x				x			Fundis of the HBS/Greens engaging with discursive contender around the idea of GT transformation
P33: VENRO_2015_Rolle und Strategien entwicklungspolitischer NGOs im Rahmen Zukunftsfähiger Entwicklung			x	x		x	x		x	umbrella organization of the German development sector taking up a radical GT discourse
P34: WBGU_2011_World in Transition_A social contract for sustainability_Summary				x	x	x	x		x	Key catalyzing event in the GT debate, as underlined by countless sources
P35: WBGU_2014_Climate protection as a world citizens movement	x		x	x	x		x		x	Follow up of the 2011 WBGU report, adding new ideas and voices, with ideas supporting the post-governance thesis
P36: WBGU_Great Transformation_comic				x	x				x	Synthesis in comic format of the highly influential 2011 WBGU report, allowing emphases to come to the fore
P37: Zukunftscharta								x		Relevant process on the topic of SET conducted by the federal government, though it largely ignores the GT debate, which is itself an interesting piece of data.
P39: Jorck, Gerrit von - 2013 - Diplomarbeit - Konzepte und Leitbilder sozial-ökologischer Transformation	x	x	x	x	x		x			Only available study inquiring systematically into the GT discourses and debate process. Proved a fruitful source for further data corpus-building and insightful thought-leads.
P40: Schmeltzer_2014_Gutes Leben statt Wachstum	x	x	x	x	x		x			Provides deep yet synthetic insight into the history of the growth critique, internationally and in Germany, as of its connections to other debates.
P41: Asara et al_2015_SOCIALLY-SUSTAINABLE-DEGROWTH-AS-SOCIAL-ECOLOG-TRANSFORMATION		x	x		x					Adds data to the genesis of degrowth and related discussion strands, and its explicit links with the GT debate
P42: Escobar_2015_Degrowth-postdevelopment-and-transitions	x		x		x		x	x		Unique overview text in the corpus exposing linkages btw. northern and southern transformation discourses by a leading scholar in the field
P43: Brand et al_2013_Debating transformations in multiple crisis_World Social Science report 2013			x	x	x		x			provides synthetic overview of transformation discourses out there.
P44: Brohmann_2014_UBA UFOPLAN transformation strategies and models of change	x					x	x			expands content-wise the project referred to in P45, introducing a conceptual framework on "meta-governance"
P45: KWI_2012_UBA UFOPLAN Transformation strategies and models of change						x	x			presents contents of current research in the UBA-SÖF framework illustrating the effects of GT debate in that realm
P46: Zivilgesellschaftliche Platform Forschungswende_Netzwerk	x		x	x	x		x			presents contents of current research in the UBA-SÖF framework illustrating the effects of GT debate in that realm